

November 16, 2007

To: Docket ID No. NHTSA-2007-27830 (Electronic Submittal)

RE: Vehicle Identification Number Requirements

NESCAUM (Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management) submits the following comments on NHTSA's proposed rulemaking to amend the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) regulation (49 CFR Part 565). NESCAUM is the association of state air pollution control agencies in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. In general, the NESCAUM states support the goal of this rulemaking effort, which is to ensure that there will continue to be sufficient numbers of unique VINs under the current 17-character system for at least another 30 years.

The NESCAUM states depend on the VIN system to identify motor vehicles, engine parameters, and fleet characteristics as part of state registration and emissions inspection and maintenance programs. However the retrievable data, available under the current system, is not always specific enough to provide essential information to the states. For example, the VIN attached to a heavy-duty vehicle chassis presently provides inadequate and highly inconsistent information regarding the installed engine. This rulemaking presents an opportunity to make minor modifications to the VIN system, which have the potential to simplify efforts and greatly enhance states' abilities to compile information on registered fleets. In this regard, we have a few suggestions to improve the proposed rule.

Identification of Test Group and Engine Family

We request that NHTSA require incorporation of motor vehicle test group and engine family identity within the VIN.

In 40 CFR Part 86, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has promulgated regulations for Control of Emissions from New and In-Use Highway Vehicles and Engines. Within Part 86 are EPA's requirements for vehicle manufacturers to place vehicles into test groups (§86.1827-01) and engine families (§86.096-24) for the purpose of demonstrating and certifying compliance with emissions standards. All vehicles within a particular test group must be identical with respect to engine displacement, number of cylinders or combustion chambers, arrangement of cylinders or combustion chambers and the applicable emission standards. Vehicles and engines grouped within families must, at a minimum, be identical with respect to cylinder bore dimensions, cylinder block configuration, location of intake and exhaust valves, method of air aspiration, combustion cycle, catalyst characteristics, thermal reactor characteristics, and type of air inlet cooler. In turn, EPA issues a single certificate of conformity with emission standards for each test group or engine family.

Access to vehicle test group and engine family identity through the VIN would better enable states to determine the emissions characteristics of their vehicle fleets. This information in turn

could be used to support air quality and transportation modeling efforts. Specifically, NESCAUM requests that the terms *test group* and *engine family* be inserted as appropriate for the vehicle types listed in Table I of §565.6 of 49 CFR and that these terms be defined according to the definitions in 40 CFR Part 86. In addition, on behalf of our states that have exercised their option under Section 177 of the Clean Air Act to adopt California motor vehicle standards, (as this terminology is used in Subpart S of 40 CFR Part 86), NESCAUM requests that the VIN include a means to identify California-certified vehicles by their respective emissions classifications.

Engine Type

We request that the definition of *engine type* be modified so that the requirement to identify engine manufacturer and make applies to all vehicle types, including Class 3 through 8 heavy-duty trucks. Further, we request that the engine model be identified as a component of the engine type.

In Table I of §565.6 of 49 CFR, for each vehicle type, there is a requirement for the *engine type* to be one of the decipherable information elements in the VIN. *Engine type* is defined in § 565.3(d) as follows:

Engine type means a power source with defined characteristics such as fuel utilized, number of cylinders, displacement, and net brake horsepower. The specific manufacturer and make shall be represented if the engine powers a passenger car or a multipurpose passenger vehicle, or truck with a gross vehicle weight rating of 4536 kg. (10,000 lbs.) or less.

The effect of the second sentence in this definition is to exclude Class 3 through 8 heavy-duty trucks from the requirement to report engine manufacturer and make. Access to the identity of engine manufacturer, make, and model through the VIN would better enable states to determine the emissions and fuel economy characteristics of their heavy-duty truck fleets, and for this reason we request this modification to the definition.

Vehicle Inspection Programs and Weight Rating Classes

The motor vehicle fleet can be divided into two broad categories: light-duty and heavy-duty. Typically, light-duty vehicles are those with gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) of 8500 pounds or less and heavy-duty vehicles are those which exceed 8500 pounds GVWR. EPA uses this broad distinction for emission standards setting purposes (see 40 CFR 86 §1803-01). In turn, states use this distinction in their vehicle emissions inspection programs. For purposes of establishing requirements for vehicle on-board diagnostic (OBD) systems, EPA further makes a distinction between heavy-duty vehicles at 14,000 pounds GVWR or less and those greater than 14,000 pounds GVWR (see 40 CFR 86 §1806-05).

Table II of §565.6 of 49 CFR, lists the weight rating classes for both light and heavy-duty vehicles. The ranges of the weight classes for light-duty vehicles (A through H) are relatively

narrow, reporting in thousand pound increments. It is unfortunate that Class G (8001 to 9000 pounds) straddles the 8500 pound cutoff between light and heavy-duty vehicles. We request that Class G be divided into two subclasses. A new Class G-1 would apply to vehicles in the range of 8001 to 8500 pounds GVWR and a new Class G-2 would apply to vehicles in the range of 8501 to 9000 pounds. Further, we request that the VIN identify the GVWR rating class for any vehicle in Class G-2 or above. Finally, for any vehicle in Class G-2 or above, we request that the VIN identify whether the particular vehicle is subject to OBD system requirements. This information will greatly simplify states' efforts to identify whether a particular vehicle is subject to its emissions inspection program and whether it requires a tail-pipe test or an OBD test.

We make one further request, regarding vehicle weight classes. In contrast to the narrow ranges (described above) for classes of light-duty vehicles, the heavy-duty vehicle classes (3 through 8) cover much wider ranges and the Class 8 range is extremely broad (i.e., 33,001 pounds and over). We request for Class 3 through 8 heavy-duty vehicles, that the VIN incorporate the exact gross vehicle weight. This information would enable states to better characterize their heavy-duty fleets.

We believe that the above-requested changes to the proposed amendments to the regulation would be relatively simple to implement and would significantly enhance the abilities of states to characterize their vehicle fleets for air quality planning and improvement purposes. If you have any questions, please contact Eric Skelton of my staff at (617) 259-2028.

Sincerely,



Arthur N. Marin
Executive Director

Cc: NESCAUM Directors