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Press Release

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Establishment of environmental protection zones means changes for drivers in Germany

(NOTE: FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC, PLEASE CALL THE CONTACT NUMBERS LISTED AT THE END OF THE STORY.)

By Art McQueen
USAG Heidelberg Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany – German cities are beginning to establish environmental protection zones, called Umweltzone, where motor vehicles that do not bear a decal certifying that they meet acceptable emission standards will be prohibited from driving.

The cities of Berlin, Hannover and Koln implemented protection zones Jan. 1, and zones will go into effect in Mannheim and Stuttgart March 1. Officials predict a widening of the law in coming years.

“While I don’t see an immediate crackdown coming, there will be random checkpoints, similar to our ‘Click It or Ticket’ program, and drivers need to be prepared,” said Lt. Col. Matthew Coulson, U.S. Army Garrison Heidelberg provost marshal.

The new law requires that all privately-owned motor vehicles, including those with U.S. Army Europe license plates, bear an emissions decal on the lower right (passenger) side of their windshields to enter a protection zone. Failure to display a decal in a protection zone can result in a 40 euro fine.

The law outlines four emissions categories based on manufacturing date:

Category 1: Cars, trucks, vans and motor homes with diesel engines registered before Jan. 1, 1997, and those with gasoline engines registered before Jan. 1, 1993. These vehicles get no decal, and cannot be driven in a protection zone.

Category 2: Diesel vehicles registered between Jan. 1, 1997, and Dec. 31, 2000 will display a red decal that allows the vehicle to be driven for five years, during which time it must be converted to meet Category 3 or Category 4 emission standards.

Category 3: Vehicles with diesel engines registered from Jan. 1, 2001 to Dec. 31, 2005 will display a yellow decal. They are unrestricted.

Category 4: Vehicles with diesel engines registered on or after Jan. 1, 2006 and gasoline-engined vehicles registered after Jan. 1, 1993, will display a green decal and have no restrictions.

Motorcycles; three-wheeled vehicles; and street-legal, four-wheeled, open-seat vehicles without windshields, are exempt from the statute, as are military vehicles -- including local transportation motor pool vehicles with government plates, Coulson said. All other vehicles, including pick-up trucks, will be categorized the same as cars.

Drivers whose vehicles have a lower rating than Category 4 can have their vehicles converted to meet higher standards and get a new emissions decal from an approved repair or inspection facility on the German economy.

“Vehicle inspection points will not be offering emissions testing,” said Tom Lorenzini, USAREUR chief of motor vehicle registration.

“However, since the stickers are based on the date of manufacture, USAREUR motor vehicle inspectors will check to see if the original catalytic converter has been removed, and if so, they will potentially remove the green stickers,” Lorenzini said.

USAREUR drivers can get the new decals free of charge at the vehicle registration offices in their communities, Coulson said. Drivers must fill out a USAREUR vehicle registration form to obtain a sticker.

“If they fill it out prior to coming in, that will save some time,” Coulson said, “and while the first one is free, additional stickers for the same vehicle will cost \$5.”

To keep waiting times down, Coulson recommends that those with two or more vehicles get stickers only for the vehicle most likely to travel in an environmental protection zone.

DoD ID card holders who live outside Germany but travel within Germany in their personal vehicles should contact the USAREUR Registry of Motor Vehicles. The RMV will verify what category of vehicle is owned and then mail the appropriate sticker.

For more information, call the USAREUR RMV customer service office at 386-7289 or 0621-718-7279. The USAREUR motor vehicle registration form is available online at <http://rmv.hqusareur.army.mil/forms/190-1aa.pdf>.

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