

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **New Auto Inspections**

Throughout the summer there have been occasional news articles about changes to our Massachusetts auto inspection system, changes to take effect in October. If you are like me, you did not pay too much attention to the articles at the time. Since October has now arrived, the inspection system is in place. It will affect us all the next time our cars are due for their annual inspection, so today's Byline talks about the new system.

The inspection system with its complexities, its dynamometers, its biennial calendar and its higher cost has been unwillingly adopted in Massachusetts. This is the background of the test along with a preview of what to expect.

First, here are the reasons for change. They are a response to requirements from Washington. The federal government sets standards for air quality, and the air in Massachusetts does not meet the clean air standard. The reasons for our poor air quality are widely considered to stem from emissions in other parts of the country that are carried east by wind currents, ending up over Massachusetts. Whatever the source, our state is required to reduce that air pollution. We have mandated that industry take significant measures to reduce emissions, but automobiles remain a major source of pollution. The legislature was forced to enact the new inspection standards.

Next, here are the changes. The previous emissions test analyzed exhaust from an idling motor. The new system reminds me of a coronary stress test that places the patient on a treadmill. In this case, the car is put on the treadmill to simulate traveling at 30 miles per hour. As you may expect, the costs of such a test are higher than the old test, and the first obstacle to implementing the system came from the resistance of service stations to installing the expensive new equipment without a substantial increase in their compensation. They requested a fee of \$34 while the state offered \$25. In order to gain participation of a sufficient number of inspection stations, the state agreed to a compromise amount of \$29.

A sufficient number of local stations have now registered as participants, so it should not be difficult to find an inspection site. Many inspection sites do not have the new equipment in place yet, however, and patrons of those stations will have a one-year waiver of the emissions analysis.

Emissions will be tested only every other year, according to the model year of the car. Odd number model years are inspected in odd numbered years. New cars are an exception. They do not need inspections if they are one or two years old.

Because the system is at this time untested, nobody knows what the failure rate of cars will be. In a concession to the deterioration of engine function over time, vehicles older than 15 years, defined this year as model year 1984, are exempt from the inspection. If your car fails to meet standards, you have 60 days to make needed repairs, but cannot be required to spend more than \$400.

As you can imagine, the legislature was extremely reluctant to allow this inspection system to come to pass. The Federal government gave the legislature no choice in the matter, but we want the program to work as well as it can. Feel free to contact me with your experiences as the sticker in your car window leads to your annual vehicle inspection. Call me at 567-1661 or send e-mail to [Mary@Rogeness.com](mailto:Mary@Rogeness.com).