# High Court trial challenges emissions claims of major car manufacturers amid ULEZ air quality gains



A significant High Court trial is set to commence, involving over a million legal claims against major car manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz. The case centres on allegations that these companies installed 'prohibited defeat devices' in diesel vehicles from 2009 onwards, enabling them to cheat emissions tests. These devices reportedly allowed vehicles to emit harmful pollutants at levels far exceeding legal limits once off the test track. The trial, expected to last three months, will scrutinise sample vehicles from five key manufacturers: Mercedes-Benz, Renault, Nissan, Ford, and Peugeot-Citroen. The cumulative value of the claims is estimated at no less than £6 billion, highlighting the considerable scale of potential liability. Beyond financial impacts, the case raises critical public health concerns, given that millions of residents across the UK may have been exposed to dangerous air pollution as a result of these practices.

The claims reflect broader anxieties about air quality and vehicle emissions standards, issues that have driven policy responses such as the introduction of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). The ULEZ—expanded in recent years—has been credited with significantly improving air quality in London. Official data indicates that nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentrations in inner London are now about 20% lower than they would have been without the ULEZ, with reductions rising to 44% in central London. These improvements have benefited approximately four million people. More comprehensive studies also show a 27% citywide decrease in roadside NO₂ levels since ULEZ’s inception in 2019, alongside a 31% reduction in small-particle emissions (PM₂.₅) in outer London.

The impact of ULEZ extends further: vehicle numbers inside the zone have fallen by 2%, notably with a 20% drop in diesel vehicles, which are among the most polluting. The zone has reduced the number of highly polluting cars by 60% in central and inner London, encouraging residents to switch to greener modes of transport. These changes are linked not only to cleaner air but also to tangible health benefits, including an observed 4.5% decline in long-term health problems and an 8% decrease in respiratory illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis. Projections are optimistic, suggesting the ULEZ and similar measures could save the NHS and social care sector around £5 billion by 2050 through reduced pollution-related health costs.

The ongoing High Court trial underlines the broader context in which these emissions standards and regulations operate. Vehicle owners who believed they were purchasing cleaner, compliant cars may now face uncertainty about the true environmental impact of their vehicles, which, according to campaigners, could be far greater than advertised due to the alleged use of defeat devices. One advocate expressed a determination to represent those suffering from the health consequences of pollutant exposure and the vehicle owners caught up in this controversy.

As London continues to expand its ULEZ and other emission-reducing initiatives, the trial serves as a stark reminder of the stakes involved in ensuring vehicle emissions compliance—both for public health and environmental integrity. The outcome of this landmark case will likely influence future regulatory frameworks and manufacturer accountability in the UK and beyond.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/londoners-breathing-cleaner-air-thanks-to-ulez), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/07/london-air-pollution-down-since-ulez-expansion-study), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-67288327), [[6]](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/pollution-and-air-quality/ultra-low-emission-zone-ulez-london/ulez-facts?utm=)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/londoners-breathing-cleaner-air-thanks-to-ulez), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-67288327), [[6]](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/pollution-and-air-quality/ultra-low-emission-zone-ulez-london/ulez-facts?utm=), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html> - A High Court trial is set to begin, involving over a million legal claims against car manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz, for allegedly installing 'prohibited defeat devices' in diesel vehicles from 2009 onwards. These devices are claimed to have enabled vehicles to cheat emissions tests, leading to higher levels of harmful pollutants being emitted than permitted. The trial, expected to last three months, will focus on sample vehicles from five manufacturers: Mercedes-Benz, Renault, Nissan, Ford, and Peugeot-Citroen. The overall value of the claims is estimated to be at least £6 billion, with potential health implications for millions of UK residents.
3. <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/londoners-breathing-cleaner-air-thanks-to-ulez> - The expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) has led to significant improvements in air quality. Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentrations in inner London are estimated to be 20% lower than they would have been without the ULEZ and its expansion, directly benefiting nearly 4 million people. In central London, NO₂ concentrations are estimated to be 44% lower than they would have been. The expansion has also resulted in a 2% reduction in overall vehicle numbers and a 20% decrease in diesel vehicles within the zone, contributing to cleaner air for residents.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/07/london-air-pollution-down-since-ulez-expansion-study> - A study has found that London's air quality has improved following the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). Roadside nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels have decreased by 27% across the city since ULEZ was introduced in 2019. Small-particle emissions (PM₂.₅) from vehicle exhausts were 31% lower in outer London in 2024 than they would have been had ULEZ not been expanded in 2023. Air quality has improved at 99% of monitoring sites across London since 2019, indicating the effectiveness of the ULEZ in reducing pollution.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-67288327> - A report indicates that London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) has led to a significant reduction in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels. Nitrogen dioxide levels had fallen by 18.4% in 2019 following the launch of ULEZ in central London, compared to the period between 2016 and 2018. Mayor Sadiq Khan has previously stated that ULEZ has resulted in a 21% reduction in nitrogen dioxide concentrations in inner London and a 46% reduction in central London. The cleaner air has contributed to a 4.5% reduction in long-term health problems and an 8% decrease in respiratory issues like asthma and bronchitis.
6. <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/pollution-and-air-quality/ultra-low-emission-zone-ulez-london/ulez-facts?utm=> - The Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in London has been effective in improving air quality. Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentrations are estimated to be 53% lower in central London, 24% lower in inner London, and 21% lower in outer London than they would have been without the ULEZ and its expansions. The ULEZ has also reduced the number of highly polluting cars in the existing central and inner London zone by 60%, with many Londoners opting for cleaner, greener vehicles and means of travel. The health benefits of the ULEZ are projected to be significant, with an estimated £5 billion saved by the NHS and social care sector by 2050.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html> - A High Court trial is set to begin, involving over a million legal claims against car manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz, for allegedly installing 'prohibited defeat devices' in diesel vehicles from 2009 onwards. These devices are claimed to have enabled vehicles to cheat emissions tests, leading to higher levels of harmful pollutants being emitted than permitted. The trial, expected to last three months, will focus on sample vehicles from five manufacturers: Mercedes-Benz, Renault, Nissan, Ford, and Peugeot-Citroen. The overall value of the claims is estimated to be at least £6 billion, with potential health implications for millions of UK residents.