

Subject: Volkswagen : Houston's Response

Below is an update on what the Mayor of Houston is doing to encourage TCEQ to re-apportion the VW settlement money.

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City of Houston says TCEQ ignores data in draft plan for distribution of Volkswagen settlement

Meantime in San Antonio, health officials say “There is a region-wide urgency and commitment to meet the standard in less than three years and avoid more severe regulations.”

Houston leaders are crying foul as Texas' draft plan to distribute a \$209 million settlement with *Volkswagen* sends almost three times as much money to San Antonio as it does to the Bayou City.

Volkswagen was directed to create a \$2.9 billion environmental mitigation trust fund as part of its restitution to reduce [diesel emissions](#). The car manufacturer also set aside \$10 billion to retrofit existing Volkswagen vehicles and \$2 billion to create a national zero emission vehicle investment plan.

The *Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's* draft mitigation plan sends \$27 million to Houston, \$29 million to Dallas, \$26 million to El Paso, \$12 million to Beaumont and \$73 million to San Antonio, even though only 11 percent of the impacted vehicles are registered in Bexar County.

“The discrepancy between the proportions of vehicles registered in these regions and the regional apportionment of funds is so great that the Trust Fund's stated purpose of utilizing the funds where the subject vehicles caused harm cannot be met by the draft plan,” Mayor **Sylvester Turner** wrote in [a letter](#), dated Sept. 14. “The Houston region had twelve times as many subject vehicles as El Paso, yet both regions would receive the same amount of funding.”

The difference between Houston and San Antonio, however, is that San Antonio is on the cusp of non-attainment under more stringent regulations, which state leaders are [fighting in court](#). Houston, on the other hand, has been under [non-attainment status](#) for 14 years. The region is not meeting the 2015 stricter standards on ozone, but it also continues to fail to meet [the 2008 standard](#).

“With our ozone readings just two points above the new (2015) standard, San Antonio is clearly in a great position to get back in attainment quickly,” said **Colleen Bridger**, director of the *San Antonio Metropolitan Health District*. “There is a region-wide urgency and commitment to meet the standard in less than three years and avoid more severe regulations.”

Houston's failure to meet the 2008 ozone standard, on the other hand, means it already must be reclassified at a higher level of non-attainment. The region projects it will take another 5 years – until 2023 – until it can meet the 2015 standard.

The Bayou City may end up being the victim of its own decade of efforts to reduce emissions.

The low-hanging fruit TCEQ wants to target – replacing older-model freight and refuse trucks, getting rid of diesel school buses, replacement of shuttle buses – are measures Houston considered well over [a decade ago](#).

Houston argues it has the worst air quality in the state, the most people impacted by poor air quality and a large population of children prone to asthma. The city had roughly 28 percent of all days in 2017 with air quality that could be considered less than good, according to [its talking points](#).

TCEQ's [beneficiary mitigation plan](#) also is clear in what it does not want to do. The plan generally follows the directives of the Texas Emission Reduction Program, or TERP. TERP considers itself fuel-neutral, which means it does not favor alternative fuels. Infrastructure for zero-emission vehicle infrastructure will be considered where it is complementary.

California, Texas and Florida receive the most significant shares of the VW Mitigation Trust Fund. Other states will use the money to ramp up electric vehicle charging stations ([New Hampshire](#)), develop electric transit fleets ([New York](#)) and cleaner trains ([Illinois](#)).

TCEQ will take comments on the mitigation plan [through Oct. 8](#).

By Kimberly Reeves

Sincerely,

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