

State of New Hampshire
Department of Safety
Department of Environmental Services
New Hampshire OBD II and Safety Testing Program
Frequently Asked Questions for Motorists

1. What is OBD II?

Automobiles manufactured since the early 1980s were equipped with "smart" computer systems, known as on-board diagnostics (OBD). These systems were developed to help repair technicians identify problems associated with the computerized engine systems of modern vehicles. A second generation OBD computer (referred to as OBD II) is present on all 1996 and newer vehicles. All OBD II equipped vehicles monitor the same components, use the same type of connector, use the same computer "language" and use the same criteria for evaluating components related to vehicle emissions.

The OBD II computer not only does a good job of making sure the engine runs at peak efficiency, but it also will alert the consumer of any malfunctioning emissions control components that require attention. When the OBD II system detects a problem with the emission control system, a "check engine" or "service engine soon" light is illuminated on the dashboard. The system helps alert the motorist of malfunctions in the vehicle. Often early detection and repair of minor malfunctions can help avoid more extensive and expensive repairs.

2. How are the OBD II and Motor Vehicle Safety Inspection programs different?

Since the 1930's, New Hampshire vehicles were inspected to ensure they were safe to operate. The safety inspection covered vehicle components such as brakes, tires, steering, electrical system, suspension, and lights. Beginning 1999, safety inspections on 1980 and newer vehicles included a visual check for emissions equipment such as the catalytic converter, PCV valve and evaporative canister.

Starting 2005, New Hampshire's vehicle safety and emissions inspection program – called the New Hampshire OBD II and Safety Testing Program (NHOST) – incorporated two important changes. First, the reporting system became fully automated. Second, the visual emissions components inspection was replaced with OBD II testing for 1996 and newer light duty vehicles. The safety portion of the inspection for all vehicles is still the same and pre-1996 non-OBD II equipped vehicles will still have the visual check of emission control components.

When New Hampshire implemented the OBD II test program, it made sense to run the safety inspection and the OBD II test at the same time to make it easier for vehicle owners to comply with both requirements and to simplify the inspection, testing and reporting process.

3. How much will the OBD II test cost?

Because the OBD II test and Safety Inspection are conducted at the same time, and motorists charged a single price for both, it is difficult to know how much the OBD II test alone would cost. However, the OBD II test is very fast, adding less than 5 minutes to the safety inspection process. New Hampshire does not set the cost; it will vary from station to station. The NHOST web site (<http://nhostservices.com/>) offers limited information on combined inspection and test costs if the inspection station reports what they charge. Reported fees range from about \$30.00 to \$50.00.

4. My vehicle failed the OBD test because it was “not ready.” What does that mean?

For an OBD II computer to “know” all the emissions components are operating properly, it must monitor the car’s performance during a variety of operating conditions ranging from idling to high speed highway travel. A vehicle may test as “not ready” because the battery became discharged or was disconnected or because recent servicing was performed which “reset” the computer. Generally, normal use for a few days will satisfy the conditions to avoid a “not ready” test result and your owner’s manual should provide more specific information on getting your vehicle’s OBD II system ready.

5. What happens if my vehicle is rejected (i.e., fails the inspection)?

As in the past, if your vehicle is rejected for any portion of the safety inspection, you will not receive an inspection sticker. The vehicle must be repaired and re-inspected by the tenth of the month following the inspection month.

If your vehicle passes the safety inspection but is rejected for the OBD II test, you will receive a partial sticker that indicates the date of the inspection but does not have the colored background. You will also receive a test report that specifies the reason for the rejection. You will have 60 days to have your vehicle repaired and re-tested. Generally, after repairs, you will need to do some routine driving before re-testing your vehicle to allow the OBD II system to re-calibrate itself. Consult your repair technician to determine how long this may take.

6. May I continue to drive my vehicle if the “check engine” light is on?

Generally, a vehicle may be safely driven for a short period of time with the “check engine” light on, but a driver should have the vehicle checked as soon as possible before what might be a minor problem turns into a major one. However, if the “check engine” light is on and blinking, the driver should safely pull off the road, turn off the engine and seek assistance. Vehicle owners should also check their owner’s manual for guidance on dealing with a flashing “check engine” light.

7. If my "check engine" or "service engine soon" light is NOT on, will I pass the OBD II test?

If your check engine light is not on, you will pass the test unless:

- a) Your “check engine” light bulb is not working properly (e.g., it is burned out). To find out if your bulb is working properly, check to make sure it goes on when the key is turned on and the engine is NOT running. It should go off after the engine is turned on and running.
- b) Certain components are deemed "not ready" for testing. In this case, the vehicle owner may be asked to drive around under a variety of conditions to complete a readiness "drive cycle," then return for testing. A vehicle may not be “ready” for a number of reasons, including a recently dead, replaced, or disconnected battery or recent repairs to OBD II related components.
- c) The Data Link Connector (DLC) that allows the OBD II scan tool to connect to the vehicle is damaged or missing.

8. Will repair costs be covered by warranty?

Warranty coverage varies depending on components and individual manufacturer warranty provisions. In most cases, however, responding sooner rather than later is likely to minimize the individual owner's repair liability. The federal Clean Air Act requires an 8-year or 80,000 mile warranty on the major emissions control components such as the catalytic converter, and a 2-year or 24,000 mile warranty on other emissions control components.

9. Will it cost anything to have my vehicle re-tested after making the necessary OBD II repairs?

The State does not set the cost for vehicle inspections, so different stations may have different policies on re-tests. However, the State does not charge inspection stations for the first OBD II re-test as long as the vehicle is repaired and re-tested within the 60 day grace period. Please note that inspection stations are charged an additional fee for retesting vehicles that are rejected due to safety issues.

10. If my vehicle is rejected for the OBD II test, who should do the OBD II repairs?

Regardless of whether a failure is identified by an OBD II test or if the check engine light comes on mid-year, only qualified, trained technicians equipped with the correct diagnostic and repair equipment should perform OBD II related service. Ask your repair shop if they employ trained OBD II technicians ASE certified in A6, A8 and L8 (preferred) categories, and have access to the necessary equipment to properly service 1996 and newer vehicles.

As with any vehicle repair cost, OBD II related costs may vary significantly, depending on the nature of the system or component requiring repair.

11. Is there a limit on how much I have to spend on repairs to pass the OBD II test?

New Hampshire does not set repair spending limits but does allow a waiver for economic hardship. Waivers are considered on a case by case basis and are only allowed for one year beyond which the owner must repair the vehicle. There is no such waiver for safety inspection failure repairs.

12. Will aftermarket parts work with OBD II?

As opposed to Original Equipment Manufacturer or OEM parts, aftermarket auto parts refer to those car parts that are manufactured by a company other than the original manufacturer of the car. Most aftermarket parts should work with OBD II but it is the responsibility of aftermarket parts manufacturers to ensure their parts work properly with the vehicle for which they are designed.

13. Who do I contact for help about the inspection program?

For any assistance or inquiries related to the inspection program, contact the NHOST Services Help Line at 1-800-383-4124, the N.H. Division of Motor Vehicles at 603-271-8800, or visit the NHOST website at www.nhinspect.com. For environmental information, please contact Paul Lockwood at the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, 271-5552 or paul.lockwood@des.state.nh.us.