

Germany introduces environmental zones

Jen Schoenburg

On January 1, 2008, Germany introduced new car emission regulations in select cities in an effort to improve urban air quality by reducing fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide pollution. Beginning in Berlin, Cologne, and Hannover, with more cities to follow in March and the coming months, all privately owned vehicles must have an "Umweltplakette" (environmental badge) to drive within newly designated "Umweltzonen" (environment zones) – or drivers will face a fine of €40 (US\$60). The badges are issued in three colors – red, yellow, and green – that correspond to the amount of pollution emitted by the vehicle, based on limits set by the European Union. High-emission vehicles will not receive a badge.

The new zones are demarcated by posted signs, indicating where they begin and which color badges are required to drive freely within the zone; there is no time restriction on



Germany's road signs point the way to new environmental zones.

the regulation. Public service vehicles, such as government and emergency vehicles and buses, are currently exempt from the restriction.

Public reaction to the new regulation has been mixed. According to Michael Kroehnert, Managing Director of the Climate Company (Berlin, Germany), a consulting firm dealing with climate protection, "Around 30% of the German population agrees with the regulation for health reasons. The rest seem to be opposed to it, and feel overregulated."

Those who disagree with the

action are concerned for the rights of drivers, especially those with older cars that do not meet the requirements and will therefore be banned from driving in the new zones. According to German broadcasting network ZDF, as many as 1.7 million cars throughout the country may not qualify for a badge. Some reports suggest that the German automobile club, ADAC, is planning legal action against the new regulation, in support of drivers with banned vehicles. Says Kroehnert in response, "Since this is an EU law, we do not anticipate any chance of legal action against it".

The German Federal Environment Agency (Dessau-Rosslau, Germany) applauds the move, pointing out in a press release that, "environmental zones can play a role in reducing the negative impact of nitrogen dioxide on man and the environment. There is an urgent need for action concerning this pollutant; about 50% of the urban measuring stations located near traffic areas record high levels of nitrogen dioxide." ■