

VW Calls On Whistleblowers to Step Forward

Car maker under pressure to give more detail on who was responsible for scandal



Volkswagen signs at a dealership in San Diego. The company is under pressure to give a more detailed explanation of the emissions scandal. *PHOTO: MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS*

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BERLIN— [Volkswagen](#) AG on Thursday began enlisting the help of its employees to accelerate efforts to get to the bottom of [an emissions-cheating scandal](#) affecting millions of cars, offering amnesty to workers who volunteer information.

Volkswagen has come under increasing pressure from regulatory authorities in the U.S. and Europe to quickly explain how and why the company duped environmental authorities on tests

for nitrogen-oxide emissions and, in another instance, understated greenhouse-gas emissions and fuel consumption.

“Every day counts,” Herbert Diess, head of the Volkswagen brand division, said in a memo to employees that was seen by The Wall Street Journal.

Separately, Martin Winterkorn, who resigned as Volkswagen chief executive in September in the wake of the crisis, cut his last remaining ties to the company this week, resigning as chairman of the supervisory board of VW brand [Audi](#) AG on Wednesday, an Audi spokesman said Thursday. Volkswagen has always been more than a car. It occupies a special place in German society. WSJ's Dipti Kapadia goes through some of the iconic moments for the German auto maker, now caught in a scandal over emissions. Photo: Getty Images

Nearly two months since the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency disclosed the emissions deception, the German auto maker hasn't been able to produce a clear explanation of how it happened or identified those in the company responsible, despite repeated pledges to carry out a swift and rigorous investigation.

“We depend on the cooperation and knowledge from you, our employees, to carry out a complete resolution of all events connected to the diesel and [carbon-dioxide] issues,” Mr. Diess said in the memo.

Employees have until Nov. 30 to provide “complete and truthful” information about events as part of the internal probe being conducted by U.S. law firm Jones Day. Those who come forward before the deadline “have nothing to fear from the company in the way of repercussions on the job such as being fired or held liable for damages,” Mr. Diess said in the memo.

The amnesty offer only applies to workers covered by collective bargaining pacts.

Volkswagen said it would reserve the right to transfer employees or change their responsibilities if they incriminate themselves. The company also warned that it has no influence over a decision by German prosecutors to seek criminal charges against any employees who confess to being a part of the deception.

“But we will make note of the willingness to cooperate, which experience shows could benefit the accused,” Mr. Diess said in the memo.

Volkswagen launched an internal probe on Sept. 22, five days [after the EPA notified the company](#) that it was under investigation on suspicion of violating U.S. environmental laws. The charges stem from Volkswagen’s use of software to dupe emissions tests, which Volkswagen conceded to the EPA in late August or early September. Volkswagen has admitted to installing the software on as many as 11 million diesel-powered vehicles with 1.6-liter and 2-liter engines.

The EPA has since issued a second notice of violation, alleging that Volkswagen also installed a so-called defeat device on 3-liter engines used in luxury sedans and sport-utility vehicles produced by the company’s VW, Audi and Porsche brands.

[The EPA has grown impatient with the company’s lack of progress](#) in providing a clear explanation of who was responsible for the decision to install a defeat device on these vehicles and intentionally deceive environmental authorities in the U.S. and possibly in Europe. Volkswagen Chief Executive Matthias Müller told employees shortly after he took the helm in September that any employee who volunteered information about the diesel scandal need not fear for his or her job.

That led an employee to come forward and disclose to his supervisors that the company also understated greenhouse-gas emissions and fuel consumption in as many as 800,000 vehicles in Europe, including nearly 100,000 gasoline-powered vehicles.

On the basis of this whistleblower’s evidence, Volkswagen issued a statement on Nov. 3, admitting to understating CO2 emissions and fuel consumption.

But there have been no such revelations made public by the company that are directly related to the diesel affair.