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Seven countries are to be investigated by the European Commission for failing to ensure fuel consumption figures are prominently displayed in car advertising, following a formal complaint today by green groups.



Friends of the Earth Europe, together with a coalition of environment organisations, is accusing Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Spain of failing to implement the European car labelling directive (1999/94/EC). The rule is designed to help consumers make an informed choice about the efficiency of the car they buy by making advertisers display emissions data clearly on billboard and magazine ads.

Next to engine technology and taxation, improved consumer information is one the European Union's main methods of driving down CO2 emissions from cars. By flouting the directive, manufacturers are not only acting illegally but also undermining efforts to reach the European car industry's CO2 reduction targets, argue the green campaigners.

"The past performance of carmakers already includes ignoring a voluntary agreement to reduce the fuel consumption of cars, leaving consumers to foot the fuel bill. At a time of record prices at the pump, member states are failing to protect consumers' rights to essential information by continually letting carmakers flout their legal obligation to include comprehensive information about fuel consumption in advertisements. It is now up to the European Commission to enforce community law," says Jeroen Verhoeven, a car efficiency campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe.

The official proceedings started today follow hundreds of complaints about car advertisements which breach the directive submitted by citizens across Europe as part of the 'Advertise CO2' campaign. The initiative, set up by an alliance of campaign groups in March of this year, enables consumers to file complaints to their national regulatory body about advertisements which fail to display the required emissions data. Despite the wealth of cases identified, member states have so far failed to take action to ensure compliance with the law, hence Friends of the Earth Europe's decision to ask the European Commission to investigate.

If, following the Commission's investigations, countries continue to ignore the requirements of the car labelling directive they could face legal action in the European Court of Justice.

Friends of the Earth Europe campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International.

Friends of the Earth Europe