

Ex-Volkswagen CEO denies charges in 'dieselgate' trial

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Nine years after the 'dieselgate' scandal engulfed Volkswagen, former CEO Martin Winterkorn will finally go on trial for his role in what prosecutors consider a fraud conspiracy.

Former Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn denied the charges against him as his "dieselgate" trial began, his lawyer said Tuesday, nine years

after the scandal first plunged the German auto titan into crisis.

The 77-year-old "rejects the accusations leveled against him", Felix Doerr told reporters at the court in the city of Braunschweig, close to VW's historic Wolfsburg headquarters.

The carmaker admitted in 2015 that it had installed software to rig emissions levels in millions of vehicles worldwide, setting off one of Germany's biggest post-war industrial scandals.

Winterkorn faces charges including fraud over the use of the so-called defeat devices, which made cars appear less polluting in lab tests than they were on the road, and could be jailed for up to 10 years if convicted.

He resigned as head of the VW group—whose brands range from Porsche and Audi to Skoda and Seat—shortly after the crisis began but previous attempts to bring him to trial had failed.

He was supposed to face court in 2021 alongside four other VW executives but proceedings against him were split off and postponed due to his poor health.

Upon arrival at the court in Braunschweig, Winterkorn told reporters he was doing "quite well".

Asked how he looked back on his life's work, Winterkorn replied: "When I see the beautiful cars, very fondly."

He briefly addressed the court at the start of the hearing to confirm his personal details, speaking slowly and leaning on a chair for support.



Volkswagen marketed its technology as 'Clean Diesel' but special devices made them appear cleaner during testing than during road use.

Questions about Winterkorn's health hang over the proceedings, with reports saying he had to undergo an operation in mid-June.

Some 89 hearings have been scheduled through September 2025.

But his lawyer Doerr said the defense team were confident he would be able to cope with the trial and they do not expect it will take until next year to wrap up the proceedings.

Buyers 'deceived'

Winterkorn faces several charges.

He has been accused of conspiracy to commit fraud, with the allegation based on the claim that buyers of some of the group's vehicles were "deceived about their characteristics" due to the use of defeat devices, according to the court.

The alleged fraud relates to about nine million vehicles sold in Europe and the United States, with the buyers facing financial losses running into hundreds of millions of euros, it said.

However, Winterkorn has not been accused of involvement in the offense for its entire period, which was from 2006 to 2015. He was VW chief executive from 2007 until 2015.

He has also been accused of giving false testimony to a German parliamentary committee in 2017 when it was investigating the scandal.



US consumer advocates have been among the most successful in getting compensation for VW owners.

He said that he knew of the existence of the defeat devices only in September 2015 but prosecutors claim it was earlier.

Winterkorn further faces a charge of market manipulation.

He is alleged to have "deliberately failed to inform the capital market in good time" after finding out about the emissions-rigging software, in violation of German stock market regulations.

Winterkorn had already agreed a settlement with Volkswagen in 2021,

under which he would pay the company 11 million euros (\$12 million) in relation to the controversy.

Ahead of the trial, Volkswagen noted it was not party to the proceedings although it said that it would be monitoring them.

The highest-ranking former executive to have been convicted so far in the scandal is ex-Audi CEO Rupert Stadler.

In June last year, he received a suspended sentence and a fine as part of a deal in exchange for admitting to fraud by negligence.

The fraud has already cost VW more than 30 billion euros in fines, legal costs and compensation to car owners, mainly in the United States.

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