



Registering an Out-of-State Vehicle in California

Moving to California or buying a vehicle titled in another state? Use this checklist to register your out-of-state vehicle through the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

QUICK ANSWER

New California residents must register their out-of-state vehicle at a CA DMV office. Most vehicles require a California smog certificate before first registration, and a physical VIN verification may also be required. Register promptly after establishing California residency to avoid late penalties.

KEY FACTS

State	California
Agency	California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)
Process	See official source
Notary required	Not specified
Bill of sale	Not specified
Odometer disclosure	Not specified
Last reviewed	May 10, 2026

QUICK REFERENCE

NOTARY Not specified	BILL OF SALE Not specified	ODOMETER Not specified	INSPECTION Yes
-------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	-------------------

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

Required checklist

- ☐ **Out-of-state title (properly assigned to you, if purchased)** **REQUIRED**
The existing title from the other state. If you purchased the vehicle, it must be signed over to you.
- ☐ **Government-issued photo ID (current California address)** **REQUIRED**
Most states require proof of residency to register a vehicle.
- ☐ **Proof of California address** **REQUIRED**
Utility bill, lease agreement, or other proof of current residency.
- ☐ **Proof of insurance meeting California minimum requirements** **REQUIRED**
Insurance from an insurer licensed in California.
- ☐ **Odometer disclosure statement** **CONDITIONAL**
Required if the vehicle is under 10 years old.
- ☐ **VIN verification (may be required)** **CONDITIONAL**
Some states require a physical VIN inspection by law enforcement or a DMV inspector.
- ☐ **Safety and/or emissions inspection (if required)** **CONDITIONAL**
Check whether your state requires an inspection before registration.
- ☐ **Payment for title and registration fees** **REQUIRED**

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

Inspection: Yes — Smog certification is required for most vehicles being registered in California for the first time. VIN verification may also be required.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

- 1 Establish residency in California (get a local address if you haven't).
- 2 Obtain the out-of-state title (properly assigned to you, if purchased).
- 3 Check whether California requires a VIN verification or safety/emissions inspection.



- 4 Complete any required inspections.
- 5 Submit the title, application, ID, proof of insurance, and fees to the state motor vehicle agency.
- 6 Surrender the out-of-state plates if required.
- 7 Receive your new California title and registration.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Arriving at the DMV without a California smog certificate — most vehicles being registered for the first time in California require smog clearance before the title and registration can be issued.
- Skipping VIN verification — some out-of-state vehicles require a physical VIN inspection before a California title can be issued.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

CA DMV — New to California

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/vehicle-registration/new-to-california/>

California DMV

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov>

CA DMV Forms

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/forms/>