The Bottom Line
If you are a California resident and acquire a new car, truck, or motorcycle from another state, it must be certified to meet California smog laws to be registered in California. This includes certain diesel-powered vehicles. The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) cannot accept an application to register a vehicle in California that does not qualify for registration (California Health and Safety Code §§43150 – 43156).

What Is Considered a New Vehicle?
California considers any vehicle with less than 7,500 miles on the odometer at the time of purchase or trade by a California resident or business, to be a new vehicle. This is true whether or not the vehicle has been registered in another state.

Aren’t All Vehicles California Certified?
Not all new vehicles are manufactured to be sold in California. Many manufacturers make vehicles to be sold only in the other 49 states. These vehicles (49-state) are made with smog equipment that meets federal emission standards, but not California standards. California-certified (50-state) vehicles are made to be sold in California.

Check the Label
To find out whether a car, truck, or motorcycle is California certified, check the emission label under the hood. For a motorcycle, check the frame or refer to your owner’s manual for the location. The label should read that the vehicle conforms to California regulations, or that it is legal for sale in California.

Exemptions
There are a few exemptions to the law. As a California resident, you may be able to register a 49-state vehicle if it was:
- Obtained as part of a divorce, inheritance, or legal separation settlement.
- Purchased to replace your California registered vehicle that was stolen while you were using the vehicle out of state.
- Purchased to replace your California registered vehicle that was destroyed or made inoperative beyond reasonable repair while you were using the vehicle out-of-state.
- An emergency vehicle, pursuant to California Vehicle Code §§27156.2 and 27156.3.
- Registered by you in the state of your last active military service outside California.
- A street motorcycle or motor-driven cycle year model 2005 and older, with an engine less than 50 cubic centimeters (cc) displacement. Beginning January 1, 2006, street motorcycles and motor-driven cycles year model 2006 and newer, with engines less than 50 cc displacement, require an emission label certifying them to meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency emission regulations, and may be registered regardless of mileage.
Does This Apply to Someone Moving to California?

If you are moving to California from another state, you may register a new 49-state vehicle if it was first registered by you in your home state, or for military personnel, in the last state of your military service. When applying for vehicle registration in California, you must provide evidence that the vehicle was registered.

Vehicles Purchased From Out of the Country (Grey Market)

California has special requirements for vehicles imported from other countries (including Canada and Mexico). It may be very costly or impossible to modify these vehicles to meet California emission requirements and/or federal motor vehicle safety standards (FMVSS). No direct import vehicle less than two years old can be converted to California emission standards. Not all direct import vehicles over two years old can be converted to California emission standards and FMVSS. No motorcycle or diesel-powered vehicle can be converted to California emission standards. For details, contact the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

Drive Clean

Are you looking to reduce your carbon footprint, save money on gas, or just contribute less to smog? DriveClean.ca.gov is California's buying guide for clean and efficient vehicles. Since motor vehicles are responsible for more than half of the smog and global warming pollution in California, the vehicle you buy directly impacts air quality, global warming, and energy security.

Visit DriveClean.ca.gov for more information about the Environmental Performance Label, to compare scores, and to find the latest incentives.

For More Information on

- California residency and vehicle importation laws and requirements, visit DMV online at dmv.ca.gov or call the DMV Technical Compliance Section at (916) 657-6795.
- California Smog Check program, visit the Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) online at smogcheck.ca.gov or call 1-800-952-5210.
- California smog laws, grey-market vehicles, and 49-state vehicles, visit CARB online at arb.ca.gov or call 1-800-242-4450.
- Off-highway vehicle registration, see the How To: Register an Off-Highway Vehicle (HTVR 19) brochure at dmv.ca.gov.

For appointments, forms, and information visit dmv.ca.gov or call 1-800-777-0133.