Motorcycle Title Processing Guidance Map

Vehicle Information Partners

Overview: This guidance outlines how to verify FMVSS compliance for motorcycle titles by checking VINs, VIN plates, and MCO/MSOs, with specific steps for compliant, non-compliant, and error-returning cases. It also covers exceptions for older motorcycles, refund procedures, and when to refer customers to the DNR.

1. Existing Iowa Title or Out-of-State Title Transfer

Step 1: Run VIN Through NHTSA VIN Decoder

Step 2: Analyze Decoder Results

- **If the VIN returns normally and reflects FMVSS compliance:**
  - Proceed with the transfer.
  - Add a note on the VIN record stating:
  - "VIN verified through NHTSA decoder. Meets FMVSS. Verified on [date]."
  - Subject for note:
    "Motorcycle Verification"

- **If the decoder returns an error (Example: year) OR indicates OFFROAD use:**
  - Customer must provide a photo of the VIN plate.
  - County staff reviews the VIN plate for FMVSS language.
  - If VIN plate states "conforms to all applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards' (FMVSS)" → proceed to title and document verification.
  - Add a note on the VIN record stating:
  - "VIN verified through photo. Meets FMVSS. Verified on [date]."
  - Subject for note:
    "Motorcycle Verification"
  - If VIN plate does NOT indicate FMVSS compliance → Iowa Titles, initiate title cancellation. Title Cancellation reason: "Cancel-Error".
    Add a note on the VIN record stating:
    "Does not meet FMVSS requirement, failed inspection on [date]."
    OOS Titles → refer to the DNR

2. New MCO/MSO (Manufacturer's Certificate/Statement of Origin)

Step 1: Review Documentation

- Check the MCO/MSO for language stating that the motorcycle conforms to all applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards (FMVSS).
- A compliant MCO/MSO will explicitly indicate conformity.

Step 2: Run VIN Through the NHTSA VIN Decoder

- If the MCO does not contain the language stating that the motorcycle conforms to all applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards (FMVSS), enter the VIN for verification

Step 3: Evaluate Results

- **If VIN returns normally + MCO/MSO states FMVSS compliance:**
  - Title may be processed.
  - Add a note on the VIN:

  "VIN verified; conforms to FMVSS per MCO/MSO and decoder. Verified on [date]."

- **If VIN returns an error (Example: year) or OFFROAD result:**
  - Customer must provide a photo of the VIN plate.
  - County staff reviews the VIN plate for FMVSS language.
  - If VIN plate states "conforms to all applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards' (FMVSS)" → proceed to title and document verification.
  - Add a note on the VIN record stating:
  - "VIN verified through photo. Meets FMVSS. Verified on [date]."
  - Subject for note:

    "Motorcycle Verification"
  - If VIN plate does NOT indicate FMVSS compliance → refer to the DNR. Build the record, and add a note on the VIN record stating:
    "Does not meet FMVSS requirement, failed inspection on [date]."

3. Non-Compliant Motorcycles (Any Category)

If any of the following are missing, refer the customer to DNR for correct registration of the bike:

- FMVSS statement on the MCO/MSO
- FMVSS statement on the VIN plate

In instances where the customer or selling dealer is adamant that the motorcycle is conforming but no real label can be supplied, BIIP could investigate those case by case and determine if they meet the FMVSS requirements.

4. VIN Decoder Color Results and Rule of Thumb

Green: Green means go, no photo required. The VIN decoder had verified that it is street legal. Dual on/off means it can be dual registered with the Iowa DOT to use on public roads and with the DNR for the off-road trails.

Yellow: Slow down, one of the VIN characters doesn't line up with verification. Photo is required to proceed.

Red: STOP, not street legal. The customer can provide a photo, but likely not street legal. If they are persistent, refer them to your investigator.

5. Claim for Refund

If a customer receives a letter from the DOT requesting evidence of the VIN plate (federal label) for a motorcycle that is already titled and registered in ARTS, and it is determined that the vehicle does not meet FMVSS compliance requirements, the customer may be eligible for a refund of the Fee for New Registration (FFNR) and the current annual registration paid.

The FFNR may only be refunded for titles issued within the past three years. Titles issued three or more years ago are not eligible for an FFNR refund.

Annual registration fees are eligible for refund only for the most current registration year. Any annual registration that is one year old or older is not eligible.

To request a refund, the customer must complete a Claim for Refund form for both the Department of Revenue and MVD Accounting. Please include a title snapshot and bill of sale from the title records with the request forms.

6. Motorcycles 25 or More Years Old

49 U.S.C. 30112(b)(9) provides an exemption for motorcycles that are 25 years old or older. Foreign motorcycles that are 25 or more years old and do not meet the FMVSS may be titled. However, they are only allowed an antique registration.

7. Code Section

IAC 321.30(2): Unless otherwise provided for in this chapter, the department or the county treasurer shall refuse registration and issuance of a certificate of title unless the vehicle bears a manufacturer's label pursuant to 49 C.F.R. pt. 567 certifying that the vehicle meets federal motor vehicle safety standards.