From: Sharr, Traci
To: Catrenich, Jarid; Nichols, Bethany; Scott, Caitlin; Kruse, Kevin; Leib, Debbie; Cox, Debbie; Dahm, Ryan; Ridout, Ryan; Maahs, Jason; Sharr, Donald; Leeman, Christopher; Fowler, Rhonda; Bremer-Jaacks, Lorrain; Demuth, Mary; Cunningham, Charles; Camel, Erika; Henry, Eric; Klaas, Mellisa; Said, Denise; Duncan, Chris; Stupp, Tiffany; Smith, Megan; Pinegar, Angela; Hardman, Eileen
Cc: Sharr, Traci
Subject: March 2026 Newsletter
Date: Tuesday, March 31, 2026 12:09:38 PM
Attachments: image002.png
VIN PLATE-FMVSS.png.pdf
Stickers on Titles.pdf



No Specialty Plates for Official Vehicles

Official registration of plates for government agencies are exempt from paying tax, title, and license fees. Because of these provisions in Code, MVD does not issue any type of specialty plate for these vehicles, including blackout plates.

We are aware that some counties may have transacted these for their local agencies using a workaround, like issuing blackout plates to an official vehicle and "backing out" of the fees. The DOT is the only entity that can use the exemption code and issue titles, plates, and registrations to official vehicles. Going forward, counties need to discontinue using any workaround to issue blackout plates, or other specialty plates, to government agencies.

Towable Recreational Vehicle Dimensions

When you receive a title application for a towable recreational vehicle verify the dimensions listed on the MCO or title being presented. The vehicle may be up to 8'6" in width and its overall length shall not exceed 45 feet. When the length or width exceeds size limitations, it shall be classified as a mobile home. We have seen an increase of these with length noted as 46-47 feet recently.

On a fifth wheel, the over-cap space is part of the vehicle length. Since the hitch is under the over-cab space and does not extend past the vehicle, it is not exempt from inclusion in the overall length. Different names for it: Over-Cab, upper deck, overhang, loft, front bedroom/suite, etc.

The Department of Revenue did confirm that under Iowa Code 423.6(10), 80 percent of the purchase price of a mobile/manufactured home is exempt. To calculate the tax, take the purchase price times 0.2 (for the exemption) times the use tax rate of 0.05. Under 423.26A(5), a certificate of title shall not be issued until the tax has been paid.

Motorcycle VIN Checks

The NHTSA VIN decoder is a helpful database tool, but it can occasionally return incomplete or incorrect results (including "off-road only") because manufacturers may not submit full decoding data, update patterns after filing, or the system may default to "does not meet FMVSS" when certification data is missing. In these cases, the physical federal certification label affixed to the motorcycle is the controlling evidence of FMVSS compliance. If the VIN decoder shows "off-road only," ask the customer to provide a clear photo of the federal certification label on the bike. That label must be permanently attached (e.g., riveted or otherwise not removable without damage), printed with contrasting lettering, and located on a permanent member of the motorcycle as close as practicable to the intersection of the steering post and handlebars so it is easily readable without moving any part of the vehicle other than the steering system. The label must include the required "Manufactured By" (or "Mfd By") statement with the full name of the actual assembler (and, for applicable imports, the Registered Importer directly below). When the VIN decoder and the physical certification label conflict, rely on the label on the vehicle, and if questions remain, direct the customer to the manufacturer for clarification. Example attached above.

Court Not Needed for Valid Trust

Under Iowa Code 633A, a valid trust must have an appointed trustee who accepts the role. The trustee may also be the grantor and a beneficiary, but the trust must have more than one beneficiary. A trustee cannot be the *sole* beneficiary.

Most trusts in Iowa do not require court involvement. Court documents are typically only present when a dispute arises, misconduct is alleged, a trustee seeks court supervision or instruction, or when the trust is being modified or terminated due to a breach of fiduciary duty. Therefore, the absence of court filings does not indicate that the trust is invalid or fraudulent. If a county is presented with a full trust document, it should list beneficiaries. If the certification of trust is presented for a trust, beneficiaries are not listed.

If you have questions on the validity of a trust document presented, please send it to the county email for review. county.vehicle@iowadot.us

Current Dealership with NSF (Sky)

Counties need to immediately notify BIIP investigators if they have title transfer documents or customer inquiries involving Sky Chevrolet (located in Benton County)

or Sky Auto Mall (located in Linn County), due to insufficient funds and potential adverse title transfers.

Notify BIIP Investigators Ryan Dahm and Jason Nusbaum if:
1) title transfer checks from these dealerships bounced, or
2) customers contact the county asking if their title is there.

Gather and forward to investigators:
- customer name
- contact info (phone, email, mailing address)
- vehicle details

Secure all original documents delivered to the county; do **not** send them back to the dealership. Provide scanned copies of documents to investigators. BIIP investigators are compiling all customer and vehicle information for enforcement and coordination with the Iowa Attorney General's Office. This supports potential claims on the dealership's surety bond. Counties may direct customers to file complaints with BIIP, but information sent by counties will already be forwarded to the AG's Office.

Customers are still responsible for titling and registering their vehicles. At county discretion, counties may issue a 30-day permit under IC 321.109(3) for temporary vehicle use.

Stickers on Titles

Some titles and/or title and registration application documents are received at counties with stickers on them from customers, like lienholders, auctions, etc. Many of these customers are operating outside of our jurisdiction (Iowa) and use the stickers for their internal processing and procedures, like a tracking label. Counties may use discretion on whether to accept important documents with stickers on them. However, the use of the sticker alone does not void or invalidate the document. Titles/documents should be accepted when the sticker does not cover information needed to process the transaction. Counties are not expected to remove the sticker to obtain necessary information (and would not be able to in ERT), but should be reasonable about accepting documents where the information is still obtainable despite the sticker. Example images are attached.

Bonded Title Process

When guiding customers through the bonded title process, any inquiries from customers should be directed to the Customer Service Department at vscusto@iowadot.us or by calling 515-237-3110. Applicants can also be referred to the Iowa DOT website for

further assistance at https://iowadot.gov/registration-plates/vehicle-registration-titles/title-vehicle/bonded-certificate-title Applications are no longer sent via mail to the DOT. The application process is exclusively online. Please do not refer them to BIIP.

Thank you!

Reminder: Past newsletters can be located on the county vehicle resource site.

Iowa Department of Transportation
county.vehicle@iowadot.us