

Background to the Register

In September 1998, the Home Office set up the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team (VCRAT) to introduce a plan to meet the Government's target of reducing vehicle crime. Vehicle crime has now been reduced by over 37% from the 1998 figure. VCRAT recommended a registration scheme to control the supply of number plates. This scheme is designed to make it more difficult for thieves who put fake number plates on stolen vehicles to make the vehicles look legitimate.

There has also been an increase in people using fake number plates to avoid fines and penalties. More and more motorists are being affected by offences committed by people using their registration number on other vehicles.

It is now more difficult for criminals to get fake number plates because they need to provide ID and proof that they are entitled to them. The police continue to support this scheme. The registration scheme regulates the supply of number plates in England and Wales. The Road Safety Act 2006 extended the scheme so it will apply to Scotland and Northern Ireland from 1 August 2008.

The Law

The registration scheme, administered by the Agency, came into force on 1 January 2003. The regulations which give full details of the scheme, are given in the Vehicles Crime (Registration of Registration Plate Suppliers) (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002 no 2977), and the Vehicles Crime (Registration of Registration Plate Suppliers) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2005 (SI 2005 no 2981).

Part 2 of the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 allows a registration scheme to regulate the supply of number plates in England and Wales in order to combat vehicle 'ringing' (using a fake number plate to disguise a stolen vehicle or one used for criminal purposes) and 'cloning' (avoiding fines and penalties by using the number plate of another, legitimate vehicle.)

The Road Safety Act 2006 extends the scheme to Scotland and Northern Ireland (section 46), it enhances enforcement powers (section 44) by giving DVLA and their agents in Northern Ireland, the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) powers to enforce the RNPS scheme in addition to the Police and Trading Standards and it makes it an offence to supply number plates which do not conform to the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks Regulations) 2001 and the British Standard (section 45). The offence of supplying non-compliant plates will come into force on 1 November 2008.

The Act sets out the powers available to the police, trading standards and DVLA number plate enforcement officers. You can enter the premises of a registered number plate supplier, without a warrant and at any reasonable time, to inspect number plates held on the premises.

If a supplier refuses to let you in, you can apply to the magistrates' court for a warrant to enter the premises. You can use reasonable force to exercise the power you have under the warrant.

Penalties

If you prosecute a supplier, a magistrates' court can suspend the suppliers registration with DVLA, fine them, or both.

There are a number of offences under the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001. The offences and penalties are set out below.

Level 5 fine – up to £5000

- A person supplying number plates when they are not registered as a number plate supplier (an offence under section 17 of the act)
- A person applying to register as a number plate supplier when a court order has banned them from applying or suspended their registration (an offence under section 19 of the act)
- A person knowingly providing plates or parts for their manufacture to a supplier who is not registered (an offence under section 29 of the act).

Level 4 fine – up to £2500

- A person supplying number plates that do not comply with the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 and the British Standard BS AU145d (an offence under section 28 of the Vehicles Crime Act)
- A person knowingly supplying plates or parts for their manufacture to a business involved in selling plates that do not comply with the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 and the British Standard BS AU145d (an offence under section 28 of the Vehicles Crime Act).

Level 3 fine – up to £1000

- A person making a false application to be registered as a number plate supplier (an offence under section 19 of the act)
- A person failing to keep records as set out in the scheme regulations (an offence under section 24 of the act)
- A person failing to get the information set out in the regulations from customers (an offence under section 25 of the act)
- A person failing to report changes to the details on the register within 28 days of the change happening (an offence under section 27 of the act)
- A person failing to tell us within 28 days, that they have stopped supplying number plates (an offence under section 27 of the act).

Level 2 fine – up to £500

- A person trying to stop an authorised person from exercising his or her powers (an offence under section 26 of the act)

The court must tell us, through the Court Notification for RNPS form (V949), about any order it made to suspend a registration or ban a person from applying for registration.

Who does the scheme affect?

The scheme affects:

- manufacturers
- distributors
- assemblers
- motor factors
- motor dealers
- retail outlets and
- online traders.

A number plate supplier is someone who supplies finished number plates that include the registration number of a vehicle registered with DVLA or DVA.

Fleet operators in England, Wales and Scotland (this facility is not available in Northern Ireland) that are members of DVLA's Fleet Relicensing Scheme can apply to join the register. This is to help companies with fleets of 50 vehicles or more that would have difficulty providing the proof they need to buy number plates.

Manufacturers must not provide material to make number plates to suppliers in the United Kingdom who are not listed on the register, unless they:

- Only supply number plates for newly registered vehicles
- Only supply component parts for number plates; or
- Only manufacture and fit plates to their own vehicles.

Sales records

Under the scheme regulations, businesses must keep records of the number plates they sell and let DVLA, the DVA, the police and trading standards see those records to detect crime, when requested.

Suppliers need to keep the following information.

- The registration number of the plate sold
- The customer's name and address and entitlement to the number plate
- A number which can be used to trace a customer and is taken from **original documents**.
The number should be:
 - The customer's driver number
 - A document reference number taken from section 1 of the V5C/V5C(NI); or
 - In the case of plates fitted by a repairer an insurer has appointed, the insurer's reference and policy number
 - The DVLA/DVA/VOSA stamp details from the Number Plate Authorisation Certificate (V948.)

Documents suppliers can accept as ID and proof of entitlement

Suppliers must check original documents to confirm the customer's identity, address and entitlement to the registration number. They must check at least one document from each column in the table below.

Documents to confirm identity	Documents to confirm entitlement to the registration number
A driving licence, with or without a photo and whether or not it was issued in the United Kingdom	A Vehicle Registration Certificate (V5C/V5C(NI))
An electricity, gas or water bill, a landline telephone bill, a council tax bill, (a rates bill in Northern Ireland) issued within the last six months	The new keeper supplement (V5C/2/V5C/2(NI)) of the Vehicle Registration Certificate (V5C/V5CNI)
A bank or building society statement issued within the last six months	A Certificate of Entitlement (V750/V750(NI))
A current passport, whether or not it was issued in the United Kingdom	A Retention document (V778) (N/A to Northern Ireland)
A national identity card	A Renewal Reminder for a tax disc or SORN (V11/V11(NI))
A debit card or credit card issued by a bank or building society	A Temporary Registration Certificate (V379) (N/A to Northern Ireland)
A police warrant card	A Number plate Authorisation Certificate (V948) with an official DVLA/DVA/VOSA stamp
An armed forces identity card	A letter of authorisation from a lease or hire company, including fleet operators. The letter must quote the document reference number from the (V5C/V5C(NI))
	Record of the insurer's name, reference and policy number (for repairs approved by an insurance company)

Used vehicle dealers

Dealers who are registered as number plate suppliers and sell used vehicles and fit new number plates to vehicles in their own stock have to keep a record of:

- The 11 digit document reference number shown in section 1 of the V5C/V5C(NI)
- The date the number plate was replaced; and
- The registration number of the vehicle.
(This only applies to refitting plates, not selling replacement plates. In this case suppliers must check a customer's ID and their entitlement to buy the registration number.)

Plates fitted after insurance claims

If plates are fitted to a vehicle that has been referred to a body repairer by an insurer, the V5C/V5C(NI) might not be available, so the supplier can record the insurer's reference number and policy number instead, together with details of ID provided by the customer.

General points

The person buying a number plate does not have to be the registered keeper. Someone can buy a number plate for another person.

If a supplier provides other suppliers with complete plates or parts of plates that they will sell on, they need to be sure that the business they are supplying is registered. They should keep a record of the supplier's registration number. The other supplier is responsible for checking the end customer's ID and proof of entitlement. Suppliers are responsible for keeping sales records for three years.

If suppliers do not keep proper records they are breaking the law under section 24 of the Vehicles Crime Act. They could be fined up to £1000, suspended from the register, or both.

Suppliers should make sure they dispose of unwanted plates correctly and securely, so they cannot be used illegally. Plates should be cut into at least four pieces with no piece showing over half of the registration number.

Non-Compliant Number Plates

It is already an offence for motorists to display non-compliant number plates on their vehicles. From 1 November 2008 it will become an offence to supply number plates that do not conform with the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 and the British Standard. This offence will apply throughout the UK and carries a maximum penalty of £2500 and/or suspension from the register for up to 5 years. It will be illegal to supply plates with the vehicle registration mark (VRM) mis-spaced to look like the name of an individual, non standard font/colour or with a slogan or message printed on them.

Information about the display of registration marks can be found on leaflet 'Display of Registration Marks for Motor Vehicles' (V796).

Foreign Number Plates

The registration scheme does not apply to foreign number plates. However, suppliers should make sure that foreign plates are not for vehicles registered in the UK. To guard against fraud, suppliers should ask for an entitlement document showing what vehicle the plates are for. They should also keep a record of the reference number on the document.

Details on the internet

The names and addresses of registered number plate suppliers are held on the website at www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

How suppliers register

A number plate supplier with just one place of business must fill in and return application form V940.

A number plate supplier with two or more places of business must fill in form V940 and supplementary form V940/1.

Suppliers can download application forms from our website at:

www.direct.gov.uk/motoring or get them by phoning us on 0870 600 1016.

Suppliers can apply and pay the registration fee (£40 per business with an additional fee of £40 for each sales outlet) by credit card or debit card, by calling 0870 600 1016.

Suppliers must send the application form, together with their registration fee to:

DVLA

The Register of Number Plate Suppliers

Swansea SA99 1DB.

All successful applications will receive an Acknowledgement Letter (V942) as confirmation that the business is a registered number plate supplier.

Registration fee

Suppliers must pay a one – off fee of £40 for each place of business. This fee covers the costs of running and enforcing the scheme. Number plate suppliers must register their head office together with each sales outlet and provide a fee of £40 for each of the premises. The company's head office will be given the Supplier Identity Number (SID) for the purpose of the register, with each sales outlets being noted on the register under the head office SID. However, subsidiary companies should register separately to get their own SID number.

How long registration lasts

A suppliers registration will last as long as they provide number plates as part of a business. A supplier's registration will end if the supplier no longer provides number plates. If this is the case, we must be told within 28 days.

A magistrates' court can suspend a business as a number plate supplier for up to five years. When the suspension ends, we will reinstate the supplier after writing to the business concerned to find out if they want to start supplying number plates again.

Change of registration details

Suppliers must tell us about changes to the details we hold on the register. They must do this by filling in the changes section on the Acknowledgement Letter (V942) we sent them.

Suppliers must send the letter to:

DVLA

The Register of Number Plate Suppliers

Swansea SA99 1DB.