

**LOOKUP AND CHECKLIST · AT THE SCENE OR AFTER**

FIND THE COMPANY BEHIND THE VEHICLE

THE NUMBERS ON THE DOOR TELL YOU.

Federal and California rules require most trucks used for business, and vans that haul for pay, to show the operating company's name and number on both sides. Type a USDOT number, an MC number, or a company name to see the company on record and the insurance it has filed. The checklist covers rentals, public vehicles, and plates.

THE MARKINGS ON THE VEHICLE

☐ **The USDOT number, after the letters "USDOT"**

A company operating a commercial vehicle under federal rules must show its name and USDOT number on both sides, under 49 CFR 390.21T. That number is the key to the federal records in the lookup above.

☐ **Any MC number**

An MC number is a federal docket number for interstate carriers for hire and for brokers. It may appear beside the USDOT number, and the lookup accepts it. A private fleet hauling its own goods has none.

☐ **A CA number**

A truck that only works inside California may show a California carrier number instead of a USDOT number, under Vehicle Code 34507.5. The Highway Patrol's carrier search looks it up: choose CA number and type the digits.

☐ **The company name, and any name after "operated by"**

When another company's name appears on the vehicle, the operating carrier's name must follow the words "operated by," under 49 CFR 390.21T(b)(3). Vehicle Code 27900 requires the operator's name on vehicles that haul for pay in California. The largest name on a truck or van can be a brand or a customer rather than the company responsible for the driver.

☐ **The unit number**

Fleets number their vehicles. Maintenance records identify each vehicle by "company number, if so marked," under 49 CFR 396.3(b)(1), so the unit number ties this vehicle to its own repair file.

☐ **Trailer, container, and chassis numbers**

A trailer or a port chassis can belong to a different company from the truck pulling it. A chassis provider must be identified by name and USDOT number, on the curb side or in the interchange paperwork, under 49 CFR 390.21T(g).

☐ **A rental company's name and number**

A truck rented for 30 days or less may show the rental company's name and USDOT number instead of the renter's, under 49 CFR 390.21T(e), so the lookup returns the rental company. The rental agreement carried in the truck names the renting company. Ask the officer to record it.

☐ **A hazmat placard and its four-digit number**

A diamond-shaped placard means a hazardous load, which carries higher federal insurance minimums under 49 CFR 387.9. The CHP truck supplement records the four-digit number, so photograph it.

PHOTOS BEYOND THE POLICE REPORT

☐ **All four sides and the rear, close enough to read**

Small print near the doors, on the bumper, and on the rear doors can carry the company name and number. A photo you can zoom into is better than a note.

☐ **The markings on any van under 10,001 pounds**

The CHP truck supplement, which records "all carrier identification numbers," is required only for vehicles of 10,001 pounds or more, placarded loads, and larger buses (CHP 555D instructions). For a delivery or work van, your photos may be the only record of its markings.

☐ **The driver's badge, vest, or uniform**

A branded van may be driven by an employee of a separate delivery company. Amazon says its delivery partners "as independent businesses hire and manage their own employees" (Amazon). A badge or the officer's report may name that company.

☐ **Any camera on the vehicle**

A lens on the windshield, a mirror, or the roof means video may exist. No rule sets how long a company keeps camera video, so the preservation letter names the camera system.

☐ **The tow company and where the vehicle went**

The vehicle and its data are evidence. The tow company's name tells us where to send a request to keep it unrepaired.

☐ **The responding agency and the report number**

Under Vehicle Code 20012, the agency must disclose the whole report to injured people and their attorneys. The report lists the registered owner, which for a rented or leased vehicle can be the rental or leasing company.

GOVERNMENT VEHICLES

☐ **An agency name or seal, and any unit number**

A city, county, school district, or transit agency is a public entity. A claim for injury against it must be presented within six months under Government Code 911.2, much sooner than the two-year deadline for a lawsuit against a private company.

☐ **The company name on a garbage truck**

In Los Angeles, many commercial and apartment building garbage trucks belong to private franchise haulers, which are private companies on the ordinary two-year deadline. Residential curbside trucks are usually the City's. The name on the door decides which.

☐ **A Postal Service or other federal vehicle**

A claim against the United States must be presented in writing to the agency within two years under 28 U.S.C. 2401(b); for the Postal Service, that is usually a Standard Form 95. Our government and postal vehicle guide covers both tracks.

A PLATE NUMBER ALONE

☐ The exchange of information at the scene

Under Vehicle Code 16025, each driver must give a name, address, driver's license number, vehicle identification number, the registered owner's address, and the insurer's name and policy number. Ask, and photograph the documents.

☐ The plate, the state, and a description, given to the officer

If the driver left, report it and give the officer every marking you saw. Identifying an owner from a plate is a job for the police and, in a case, for the channels the law allows.

☐ The police report

The report lists the registered owner and, for a truck of 10,001 pounds or more, the carrier's name and numbers. We request it for you.

☐ No plate lookup websites

We do not offer a plate lookup, and we do not recommend one. Federal law restricts how personal information from motor vehicle records may be released and used (18 U.S.C. 2721), and a person who obtains it for a purpose the law does not permit can owe at least \$2,500 in damages (18 U.S.C. 2724).

PUBLIC VEHICLES: SIX MONTHS

A claim for injury against a city, a county, a transit agency, a school district, or the State must be presented within six months of the crash under Government Code section 911.2. That is far shorter than the two years for a lawsuit against a private company. Our government vehicle guide explains the claim.

WHAT THE FEDERAL RECORDS SHOW

The lookup reads public data filed with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. It shows filings, not responsibility: the federal SAFER snapshot lists crashes "without any determination as to responsibility," and a company on record is not proof of who was driving or who is liable. Insurance on file may not be the full coverage, and private fleets and carriers that stay inside California do not have to file liability insurance with FMCSA at all. The Safety Measurement System adds: "Readers should not draw conclusions about a carrier's overall safety condition simply based on the data displayed in this system."

NO AFFILIATION

Wise Law is not affiliated with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the U.S. Department of Transportation, or the California Highway Patrol. The lookup does not log your searches or tie them to you, and it links to the official federal pages, which are the authoritative record. This page is general information, not legal advice.

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