

TRAILERS

Trailers are defined in law as vehicles designed to be towed by a motor vehicle (PVC § 102).

The fact that a towing vehicle is exempt from registration does not automatically exempt the towed trailer from registration. The Vehicle Code requires all trailers to be registered unless specifically exempted from registration (PVC § 1301(a)).

The Vehicle Code provides an exemption from registration for certain trailers used in farming operations. However, in order for the trailer to be exempt, the Department of Transportation must determine that the trailer is exclusively used for agricultural operations (PVC § 1302(2)). The Department has determined by regulation that farm wagons, field equipment (choppers, disc harrows, cultivators, balers and the like) and vehicles designed to haul and apply fertilizers and insecticides during daylight hours and not operated more than 25 miles per hour are exclusively used in agriculture (PaDOTRegs § 11.2). In all other cases, the Department will need to specifically determine whether an individual trailer is exclusively used in agriculture and therefore exempt from registration.

Farm trailers exempt from registration may only be operated on:

- Roads that adjoin the trailer owner's farm (PVC § 1302(2)(i));
- Roads between the trailer owner's farms located not more than 25 miles apart (PVC § 1302(2)(ii)); or
- Roads between the trailer owner's farm and a place of business within a radius of 25-miles of the farm for the purpose of buying or selling agricultural commodities or supplies or for the purpose of repairing or servicing the trailer (PVC § 1302(2)(iii)).

The Vehicle Code also exempts from registration any trailer to be used primarily for off-highway use and only operated incidentally upon the highway (PVC § 1302(11)).

In all other situations, the trailer must be registered annually. The registration fee for trailers is \$6 for trailers registered at 3,000 pounds gross weight or less, \$12 for trailers registered between 3,001 and 10,000 pounds gross weight, and \$27 for trailers registered at greater than 10,000 pounds gross weight (PVC § 1920)(a). Owners of trailers registered at 10,000 pounds or less may obtain a 5-year registration for the trailer at 5 times the annual fee (PVC § 1920(b)). Owners of trailers registered at greater than 10,000 pounds may obtain a permanent registration for the trailer at a fee of \$135 (PVC § 1920(c)).

If the trailer is required to be registered, the trailer is also required to be periodically inspected and have a valid inspection sticker (PVC § 4703(a)). An exemption from periodic inspection is provided to trailers with a registered gross weight of 3,000 pounds or less (PVC § 4703(b)(5)).

Trailers towed by vehicles other than implements of husbandry must have rear lighting, if the trailer or the trailer's load obstructs the rear lights of the towing vehicle (PVC § 4905(e)) Required lighting would include rear lights and reflectors, brake lights, turn signals and hazard warning lights that meet the standards established in the Department of Transportation regulations (PVC §§ 4303(b) and (c)).

If the trailer is connected to a ball-and-socket hitch or a pintle hook without a locking device, two safety chains must also be used to link the trailer with the towing vehicle. The chains must be of equal length, and the chain's strength must be at least equal to the gross weight of the trailer. The chains must be connected in a crossed pattern, must be connected in a manner that prevents the tow bar from going to the ground in the event the bar becomes disconnected from the ball or hook. and must not have more slack than is necessary to permit proper turning when connected (PVC § 4905(d)).

Trailers over 3,000 pounds gross weight must be equipped with a breakaway system that the trailer will automatically stop in the event it become disconnected from towing vehicle during travel (PVC § 4502(c)).

Although farmers often use trucks to tow farm trailers displaying slow moving vehicle emblems on the rear of the vehicle, such action can easily become a violation of the Vehicle Code, since the Code prohibits a vehicle with a slow moving vehicle emblem from being operated at a speed greater than 25 miles per hour (PVC § 4529(b)).