

---

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

---

**2001 No. 561**

**The Road Vehicles (Display of  
Registration Marks) Regulations 2001**

**PART I**

**PRELIMINARY**

**Citation, commencement and revocation**

1.—(1) These Regulations may be cited as the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 and shall come into force—

- (a) for the purposes of this paragraph and regulation 17, on 21st March 2001, and
- (b) for all other purposes, on 1st September 2001.

(2) The regulations specified in Schedule 1 are hereby revoked.

**Interpretation: general**

2.—(1) In these Regulations the following expressions shall have the following meanings—

“the Act” means the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994;

“agricultural machine” means a vehicle which is—

- (a) an agricultural tractor, as defined in paragraph 4B(2) of Schedule 1 to the Act<sup>(1)</sup>, or
- (b) an off-road tractor, as defined in paragraph 4B(4) of that Schedule, or
- (c) a light agricultural vehicle, as defined in paragraph 4C(2) of that Schedule, or
- (d) an agricultural engine, or
- (e) a mowing machine;

“the Council Regulation” means Council Regulation (EC) No. 2411/98<sup>(2)</sup> on the recognition in intra-community traffic of the distinguishing signs of member states in which motor vehicles are registered;

“dual purpose plate” means a plate or other device which displays both the registration mark of the vehicle and the international distinguishing sign of the United Kingdom in accordance with the Council Regulation;

“EEA State” means a state which is a contracting party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area signed at Oporto on 2nd May 1992 as adjusted by the Protocol signed at Brussels on 17th March 1993;

“motor cycle” means a vehicle having 2 wheels and includes a vehicle of that description in combination with a sidecar;

---

(1) Paragraphs 4B and 4C of Schedule 1 were inserted by the Finance Act 1995, Schedule 4, paragraph 10.  
(2) OJ No. L 299, 10.11.98, p. 1.

“motor tricycle” means a vehicle having 3 wheels symmetrically arranged;

“quadricycle” means a vehicle having four wheels, a maximum net engine power not exceeding 15 kilowatts and an unladen mass (excluding the mass of batteries in the case of an electrically-powered vehicle) not exceeding—

- (a) 550 kilograms in the case of a goods vehicle, and
- (b) 400 kilograms in any other case;

“registration plate” means a plate or other device displaying the registration mark of the vehicle and in the case of a dual purpose plate means such part of the plate as is not intended for the display the international distinguishing sign of the United Kingdom in accordance with the Council Regulation;

“prescribed font” means the style shown in Schedule 4 for a character of the height specified in that Schedule;

“relevant date” means—

- (a) in Great Britain, 1st October 1938, and
- (b) in Northern Ireland, 1st January 1948;

“works truck” means a vehicle which is—

- (a) designed for use in private premises, and
- (b) used on public roads only—
  - (i) for carrying goods between private premises and a vehicle on a road in the immediate vicinity, or
  - (ii) in passing from one part of private premises to another or between private premises and other private premises in the immediate vicinity, or
  - (iii) in connection with road works at or in the immediate vicinity of the site of the works.

(2) Unless the context otherwise requires, a reference in these Regulations to—

- (a) a registration plate fixed or to be fixed to a vehicle, or
- (b) a registration mark displayed or to be displayed on a plate,

is to be construed, where the vehicle is towing a trailer, so as to include a reference to the registration plate which is required under these Regulations to be fixed to the trailer or a reference to the mark displayed on the plate fixed to that trailer.

### **Exempt vehicles**

3. Nothing in these Regulations applies to—

- (a) an invalid vehicle, that is a vehicle the unladen weight of which does not exceed 254 kilograms and which is specially designed and constructed, and not merely adapted, for the use of a person suffering from a physical disability and solely used by that person; or
- (b) a pedestrian-controlled vehicle, that is a vehicle the unladen weight of which does not exceed 450 kilograms which is neither constructed nor adapted for the carriage of a driver or passenger.

## PART II

### REGISTRATION PLATES

#### Interpretation of Part II

4. In this Part the following expressions shall have the following meanings—

“diagonal length”, in relation to a relevant area, means the length of a line drawn diagonally across the square enclosing the area (so that the extent of the relevant area is thereby delimited);

“relevant area”, in relation to a registration plate, means the area contained in a square described on the ground—

- (a) in front of the vehicle in the case of a plate fixed on the front of the vehicle, and
- (b) behind the vehicle in the case of a plate fixed on the rear of the vehicle,

where one corner of the square is immediately below the middle of the plate and the diagonal of the square from that corner is parallel to the longitudinal axis of the vehicle;

“relevant type-approval directive” means—

- (a) in the case of a motor cycle, motor tricycle or quadricycle—
  - (i) Council Directive [93/94/EEC\(3\)](#) (as amended by Commission Directive [99/26/EC\(4\)](#)) as regards the space to be provided for fixing of the rear registration plate, and
  - (ii) Council Directive [93/92/EEC\(5\)](#) as regards the rear registration plate lamp;
- (b) in the case of any other vehicle or a trailer—
  - (i) Council Directive [70/222/EEC\(6\)](#) as regards the space to be provided for fixing of the rear registration plate, and
  - (ii) Council Directive [76/760/EEC\(7\)](#) (as amended by Commission Directive [97/31/EC\(8\)](#)) as regards the rear registration plate lamp.

#### Fixing of rear registration plates: vehicles registered on or after the relevant date

5.—(1) This regulation applies to vehicles, other than works trucks, road rollers and agricultural machines, first registered on or after the relevant date.

(2) A registration plate must be fixed on the rear of—

- (a) the vehicle, or
- (b) where the vehicle is towing a trailer, the trailer, or
- (c) where the vehicle is towing more than one trailer, the rearmost trailer.

(3) Where a vehicle (or, in a case where the plate is required to be fixed on a trailer, that trailer) has been constructed so as to satisfy the requirements of the relevant type-approval directive, whether or not it is required by law to satisfy them, the plate may be fixed in the space provided in accordance with those requirements but if it is not so fixed it must be fixed in the manner required by paragraph (5).

---

(3) OJ No. L311, 14.12.93, p. 83.

(4) OJ No. L118, 6.5.99, p. 32.

(5) OJ No. L331, 14.12.93, p. 1.

(6) OJ No. L75, 6.4.70, p. 25.

(7) OJ No. L262, 27.9.76, p. 85.

(8) OJ No. L171, 30.6.97, p. 49.

(4) Except as provided in paragraph (3) the plate must be fixed in the manner required by paragraph (5).

(5) This paragraph requires the plate to be fixed—

- (a) vertically or, where that is not reasonably practicable, in a position as close to the vertical as is reasonably practicable, and
- (b) in such a position that in normal daylight the characters of the registration mark are easily distinguishable from every part of a relevant area having the diagonal length specified in paragraph (6).

(6) The diagonal length of the relevant area is—

- (a) in the case of a mark having characters the width of which is at least 57 millimetres, 22 metres,
- (b) in the case of a mark having characters the width of which is 50 millimetres, 21.5 metres,
- (c) in the case of a mark having characters the width of which is 44 millimetres, 18 metres.

#### **Fixing of front registration plates: vehicles registered on or after the relevant date**

6.—(1) This regulation applies to vehicles, other than works trucks, road rollers and agricultural machines, first registered on or after the relevant date.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (5), a registration plate must be fixed on the front of the vehicle in the manner required by paragraph (3).

(3) This paragraph requires the plate to be fixed—

- (a) vertically or, where that is not reasonably practicable, in a position as close to the vertical as is reasonably practicable,
- (b) in such a position that in normal daylight the characters of the registration mark are easily distinguishable from every part of a relevant area having the diagonal length specified in paragraph (4).

(4) The diagonal length of the relevant area is—

- (a) in the case of a mark having characters the width of which is at least 57 millimetres, 22 metres,
- (b) in the case of a mark having characters the width of which is 50 millimetres, 21.5 metres,
- (c) in the case of a mark having characters the width of which is 44 millimetres, 18 metres.

(5) In the case of a motor cycle or a motor tricycle which does not have a body of a type which is characteristic of the body of a four-wheeled vehicle—

- (a) a registration plate must not be fixed on the front of a vehicle if it was first registered on or after 1st September 2001,
- (b) a plate need not be fixed on the front of the vehicle if it was first registered before 1st September 2001.

#### **Fixing of registration plates: vehicles registered before the relevant date**

7.—(1) This regulation applies to vehicles, other than works trucks, road rollers and agricultural machines, first registered before the relevant date.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (4), a registration plate must be fixed in the manner required by paragraph (3) on—

- (a) the front of the vehicle, and
- (b) the rear of—

- (i) the vehicle or,
  - (ii) where the vehicle is towing a trailer, the trailer or,
  - (iii) where the vehicle is towing more than one trailer, the rearmost trailer.
- (3) This paragraph requires each plate to be fixed—
- (a) in a vertical position or, where that is not possible, in a position as close to the vertical as is reasonably practicable, and
  - (b) in such a position that in normal daylight the characters of the registration mark are easily distinguishable, in the case of a plate fixed on the front of the vehicle, from in front of the vehicle and, in the case of a plate fixed on the rear of the vehicle or trailer, from behind the vehicle or trailer.
- (4) In the case of a motor cycle and a motor tricycle which does not have a body of a type which is characteristic of the body of a four-wheeled vehicle, a registration plate need not be fixed on the front of the vehicle.

#### **Fixing of registration plates: works trucks, road rollers and agricultural machines**

- 8.**—(1) This regulation applies to works trucks, road rollers and agricultural machines.
- (2) A registration plate must be fixed on the vehicle in a vertical position or, where that is not possible, in a position as close to the vertical as is reasonably practicable—
- (a) on both sides of the vehicles, so that the characters of the mark are easily distinguishable from both sides of the vehicle, or
  - (b) on the rear of the vehicle, so that the characters of the mark are easily distinguishable from behind the vehicle, or
  - (c) where the vehicle is towing a trailer or trailers and the plate is not fixed on the sides of the vehicle, on the trailer or the rearmost trailer (as the case may be) so that the characters of the mark are easily distinguishable from behind the trailer.
- (3) Where the towing vehicle is an agricultural machine, a plate fixed on the trailer may, instead of displaying the registration mark of the towing vehicle, display the mark of any other agricultural machine kept by the keeper of the towing vehicle.

#### **Lighting of rear registration plates**

- 9.**—(1) This regulation applies to vehicles other than—
- (a) works trucks,
  - (b) road rollers,
  - (c) agricultural machines, and
  - (d) vehicles first registered before the relevant date.
- (2) Where the vehicle is being used on a road between sunset and sunrise the registration plate fixed on the rear of—
- (a) the vehicle, or
  - (b) where the vehicle is towing a trailer, the trailer or,
  - (c) where the vehicle is towing more than one trailer, the rearmost trailer,
- must be lit in accordance with this regulation.
- (3) Where a vehicle (or, in a case where the plate is required to be fixed on a trailer, that trailer) has been constructed so as to satisfy the requirements of the relevant type-approval directive, whether

or not it is required by law to satisfy them, that plate may be lit by a lamp which complies with those requirements but if it is not so lit it must be lit in the manner required by paragraph (5).

(4) Except as provided in paragraph (3) that plate must be lit in the manner required by paragraph (5).

(5) This paragraph requires the plate to be lit so that it is easily distinguishable from every part of a relevant area having a diagonal length—

- (a) in the case of a plate displaying a mark having characters with a width of 44 millimetres, of 15 metres, and
- (b) in any other case, of 18 metres.

### **Specifications for registration plates**

**10.**—(1) A registration mark must be displayed on a registration plate conforming to the requirements prescribed by this regulation.

(2) In the case of a vehicle first registered on or after 1st September 2001 the registration plate must conform to the requirements set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2.

(3) Subject to paragraph (4), in the case of a vehicle first registered on or after 1st January 1973 but before 1st September 2001 the registration plate must conform either to the requirements set out in Part 2 of Schedule 2 or to the requirements set out in Part 1 of that Schedule.

(4) Where on or after 1st September 2001 a new registration plate is fixed to a vehicle to which paragraph (3) applies to replace a plate previously fixed thereto, the plate must conform to the requirements set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2.

(5) In the case of a vehicle first registered before 1st January 1973, the registration plate must conform either to one of the requirements set out in Part 3 of Schedule 2 or to the requirements set out in Part 2 of that Schedule or to the requirements set out in Part 1 of that Schedule.

(6) The corners of a registration plate may be rounded off provided that the requirements of regulation 14(9) (margins around registration marks) are not thereby infringed.

### **Further requirements for registration plates**

**11.**—(1) No reflex-reflecting material may be applied to any part of a registration plate and the plate must not be treated in such a way that the characters of the registration mark become, or are caused to act as, retroreflective characters.

(2) A registration plate must not be treated in any other way which renders the characters of the registration mark less easily distinguishable to the eye or which would prevent or impair the making of a true photographic image of the plate through the medium of camera and film or any other device.

(3) A registration plate must not be fixed to a vehicle—

- (a) by means of a screw, bolt or other fixing device of any type or colour,
- (b) by the placing of a screw, bolt or other fixing device in any position, or
- (c) in any other manner,

which has the effect of changing the appearance or legibility of any of the characters of the registration mark, which renders the characters of the registration mark less easily distinguishable to the eye or which prevents or impairs the making of a true photographic image of the plate through the medium of camera and film or any other device.

(4) Section 59(2)(a) of the Act (regulations the contravention of which attracts a level 3 fine) applies to paragraphs (1), (2) and (3) of this regulation.

## PART III

### REGISTRATION MARKS

#### **Interpretation of Part III**

**12.**—(1) In this Part and in Schedule 3, the following expressions shall have the following meanings—

- (a) “diagram” means a diagram shown in Part 2 of Schedule 3 and a reference to a numbered diagram is a reference to the diagram identified by that number in that part of that Schedule,
- (b) “Table A” means the table in Part 1 of Schedule 3,
- (c) “Table B” means the table in Part 3 of Schedule 3,
- (d) a reference to “relevant character height” is a reference to the height of the characters in the registration mark shown at the head of column (2), (3) or (4) of Table B as the case may be.

(2) Any provision as to measurement contained in this Part or in Schedule 3 shall be taken to be complied with—

- (a) in the case of a provision prescribing character height, if the height of the character is not more than 1 millimetre more or less than the measurement prescribed herein, and
- (b) in the case of a provision prescribing any other dimension, if the dimension of the character or the space in question is not more than 0.5 millimetres more or less than the measurement prescribed herein.

(3) For the purpose of any provision contained in this Part or in Schedule 3 as to the spacing between characters or between groups of characters or as to the width of a margin the measurement shall be made—

- (a) in the case of a horizontal spacing requirement, between vertical lines passing through the extreme edges of each character or group of characters or between a vertical line passing through the extreme edge of a character and the lateral edge of the plate (as the case may be), and
- (b) in the case of a vertical spacing requirement, between horizontal lines passing through the extreme edges of each group of characters or between a horizontal line passing through the extreme edge of a group of characters and the top or bottom edge of the plate (as the case may be).

#### **Layout of marks**

**13.**—(1) Subject to paragraphs (2) and (3), a registration mark of a description specified in column (1) of Table A must be laid out on the registration plate in conformity with one of the diagrams specified in relation to that description in column (2) of Table A.

(2) A mark displayed on a motor cycle may not be laid out in conformity with diagram 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a or 9a.

(3) A mark may not be laid out in conformity with diagram 2c, 3c, 4b or 7b if it is displayed on—

- (a) a registration plate fixed to a vehicle first registered on or after 1st September 2001, or
- (b) a new registration plate fixed to a vehicle on or after 1st September 2001 to replace a plate previously fixed thereto (except where the vehicle was first registered before 1st January 1973).

**Size and spacing of characters**

14.—(1) Except in the cases mentioned in paragraphs (2) and (3), each character in a registration mark must be 79 millimetres high.

(2) In the case of a registration mark displayed on a vehicle first registered before 1st September 2001, a character in a registration mark may be 89 millimetres high unless—

- (a) the vehicle was first registered on or after 1st January 1973 and the mark is displayed on a new registration plate fixed to the vehicle to replace a plate previously fixed thereto, or
- (b) the vehicle is a motor cycle, motor tricycle, quadricycle, agricultural machine, works truck or road roller.

(3) In the case of a registration mark fixed on a motor cycle, motor tricycle, quadricycle, agricultural machine, works truck or road roller, each character of the mark may be 64 millimetres high.

(4) The width of each character of a mark other than the letter “I” and the figure “1” must be—

- (a) in the case of a mark displayed—
  - (i) on a registration plate fixed to a vehicle first registered on or after 1st September 2001, or
  - (ii) on a new registration plate fixed to a vehicle on or after 1st September 2001 to replace a plate previously fixed thereto (except where the vehicle was first registered before 1st January 1973),

that shown in line 1 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height,

- (b) in any other case, that shown in line 2 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height.

(5) The width of every part of the stroke forming a character in a mark must be that shown in line 3 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height.

(6) Except in a case to which paragraph (11) applies, the spacing between any two characters within a group must be that shown in line 4 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height.

(7) The horizontal spacing between groups of characters in a mark must be that shown in line 5 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height.

(8) The vertical spacing between groups of characters must be that shown in line 6 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height.

(9) The width of a margin between the mark and the top, bottom and lateral edges of the registration plate must be not less than that shown in line 7 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height.

(10) Paragraph (11) applies where—

- (a) one or both of the characters is “I” or “1”,
- (b) those characters are either 79 millimetres or 89 millimetres high,
- (c) the mark is displayed on a vehicle first registered before 1st September 2001,
- (d) the registration plate displaying the mark was fixed to the vehicle before 1st September 2001 or, if that is not the case, the vehicle was first registered before 1st January 1973 and,
- (e) the plate is made of cast or pressed metal with raised characters.

(11) Where this paragraph applies the spacing between—

- (b) two characters one of which is “I” or “1” must be within the limits shown in line 8 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height, and
- (c) two characters both of which are “I” or “1” must be within the limits shown in line 9 of Table B in relation to the relevant character height,



but where one or more characters in a group is “P” or “1” all the characters within that group must be evenly spaced.

### **Style of characters**

**15.**—(1) In the case of a registration mark displayed—

- (a) on a registration plate fixed to a vehicle first registered on or after 1st September 2001, or
- (b) on a new registration plate fixed to a vehicle on or after 1st September 2001 to replace a plate previously fixed thereto (except where the vehicle was first registered before 1st January 1973),

each of the characters of the mark must be in the prescribed font.

(2) Except in a case to which paragraph (1) applies, each of the characters of the registration mark must either be in the prescribed font or in a style which is substantially similar to the prescribed font so that the character is easily distinguishable and in particular, but without prejudice to the generality of those requirements, characters must not be formed in any way described in paragraph (4) or in a manner which is similar to any of those ways.

(3) For the purposes of paragraph (2), a character shall not be treated as being in a style which is not substantially similar to the prescribed font merely by virtue of the fact that it has, or does not have, serifs.

(4) The ways of forming characters referred to in paragraph (2) are their formation—

- (a) in italic script,
- (b) using a font, other than italic script, in which the characters are not vertical,
- (c) using a font in which the curvature or alignment of the lines of the stroke is substantially different from the prescribed font,
- (d) using multiple strokes,
- (e) using a broken stroke,
- (f) in such a way as to make a character or more than one character appear like a different character or characters.

## **PART IV**

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

#### **International distinguishing signs and other material**

**16.**—(1) No material other than a registration mark may be displayed on a registration plate except material complying with the requirements of any of the relevant standards mentioned in Schedule 2.

(2) Where a mark is displayed on a dual purpose plate—

- (a) no material other than the international distinguishing sign of the United Kingdom displayed in accordance with the Council Registration may be placed in the space provided on the plate for that purpose;
- (b) no part of the international distinguishing sign must encroach beyond the extreme left of the registration mark (that is to say the outside edge of the margin prescribed by these Regulations).

(3) Unless it forms part of a dual purpose plate a registration plate may not be combined with a plate or device of any kind containing material which would not be permitted to be displayed on a dual purpose plate.

### **Optional early use of new-specification plates and prescribed font**

**17.**—(1) This regulation applies in a case where, on or after 21st March and before 1st September 2001 a registration mark on a vehicle—

- (a) is displayed on a registration plate which conforms to the specification set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 and is otherwise fixed on the vehicle and lit in accordance with the requirements of Part II of these Regulations,
- (b) conforms to the requirements of regulations 13 and 14 as to layout and spacing of characters in so far as they apply to vehicles first registered on or after 1st September 2001, and
- (c) is comprised of characters each of which is in the prescribed font.

(2) Where this regulation applies—

- (a) regulations 17 to 22 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 1971<sup>(9)</sup> or, as the case may be,
- (b) regulations 18 to 23 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973<sup>(10)</sup>,

(which provide for the format and means of display of registration plates and marks) shall cease to apply in respect of that vehicle and any trailer being towed by it and the provisions of these Regulations shall apply instead.

### **Saving for vehicles constructed before 1st January 1973**

**18.** For the purposes of these Regulations a vehicle which was first registered on or after 1st January 1973 shall be treated as if it was first registered before that date if—

- (a) it is an exempt vehicle for the purposes of paragraph 1A(1) of Schedule 2 to the Act<sup>(11)</sup>, or
- (b) not being such a vehicle, it was constructed before 1st January 1973.

### **Offences under section 59 of the Act**

**19.**—(1) For the purposes of section 59(1) of the Act (regulations: offences), the person responsible for complying with these Regulations is the person driving the vehicle or, where it is not being driven, the person keeping it.

(2) Paragraph (1) does not apply to a regulation the breach of which would constitute an offence under section 42(1) of the Act (not fixing a registration mark as required by virtue of section 23).

<sup>(9)</sup> S.I.1971/450. The Relevant amendments are by S.I. 1972/1865, 1975/1089 and 1984/814.

<sup>(10)</sup> S.R. & O. (N.I.) 1973 No. 490. The relevant amendments are by S.I. 1976/2180.

<sup>(11)</sup> Paragraph 1A was inserted by the Finance act 1996, s. 19, and amended by the Finance Act 1998, s. 17.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

26th February 2001

*Larry Whitty*  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary,  
Department for the Environment, Transport and  
the Regions