

A RANCHER'S GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA LIVESTOCK TRANSPORTATION REGULATIONS



There are extensive California and federal rules and regulations governing the use of vehicles. This guide provides an overview of the requirements for the legal operation of pickups and trailers commonly used in California's beef cattle industry.

For help with other transportation issues not found here, please contact the Rancher Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) at (916) 409-6902 or rtap@wrstrat.com.

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Please note: The rules and regulations below (e.g. licensing, permitting, inspection, etc.) each have separate requirements and should be reviewed independently. For example, an operator may only need a Non-Commercial Class C License to operate a pickup and/or pickup and trailer combination but may need a Motor Carrier Permit, adhere to hours of service restriction, etc.

Key Definitions

Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR): The total weight a single vehicle or trailer can carry as specified by the manufacturer. This total weight includes the total unloaded (unladen) weight of the vehicle, passengers, fuel and cargo. Typically, the GVWR for a pickup can be found on the driver's side door jam and the GVWR for a trailer can be found stenciled on a plate near the tongue or gooseneck. Exceeding the GVWR of a pickup or trailer may be dangerous and is illegal (CVC §§ 350, 9554.2, 94096.1).

Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR): The total weight of a vehicle and trailer coupled together. You can identify your GCWR by adding the GVWR of the truck to the GVWR of the trailer (CVC § 350).

Motor Truck: As defined by California law, a motor truck is any vehicle that is designed, used or maintained primarily for the transportation of property (CVC § 410).

Pickup Truck: As defined by California, a pickup is a vehicle with a GVWR of less than 11,500 pounds and an unloaded (unladen) weight of less than 8,001 pounds equipped with the standard box bed installed by the manufacturer (CVC § 471). Please note, a vehicle with a flatbed or utility bed is not considered a "pickup" under California law and likely requires added conditions to operate. A vehicle with a flatbed that has aftermarket sides or rails is likewise not considered a pickup.

Permitting & Identification

California law requires certain vehicles to operate with a Motor Carrier Permit (MCP) depending on their weight or configuration. The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) reviews and issues MCPs.

While the annual processing fee for a single private MCP is a minimal \$35, the application requires that an operator carry extra liability insurance as a condition of receiving the permit. The average amount of liability insurance that is required by an MCP is \$750,000 but may vary depending on the size and type of cargo being transported.

You can apply for an MCP by visiting the DMV website at:

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/vehicle-industry-services/motor-carrier-services-mcs/motor-carrier-permits/motor-carrier-permit-application>.

Vehicles or vehicle combinations required to operate with an MCP are (CVC § 34601):

- A truck with a GVWR of more than 11,500 pounds, including some three-quarter-ton and one-ton trucks with standard box type beds based on their weight.
- Any truck with a flatbed, utility box or having another bed configuration that does not include the original "box-type" bed installed by the manufacturer.

- A truck and trailer, regardless of gross vehicle or combined weight, which exceed 40 feet in total length when coupled together.

California law also requires certain vehicles or vehicle combinations to have a unique identification number known simply as a “CA number.” An individual can request a CA number from the California Highway Patrol (CHP) by calling (916) 843-4150.

Listing your CA number may be required on many permit and inspection applications including an application for an MCP. Vehicles or vehicle combinations required to obtain a CA number are (CVC § 34507.5):

- A truck with a GVWR of more than 11,500 pounds, including some three-quarter-ton and one-ton trucks with standard box type beds based on their weight regardless of whether a trailer is being towed.
- Any truck with a flatbed, utility box or another bed configuration that does not include the original “box-type” bed installed by the manufacturer regardless of whether a trailer is being towed.
- A truck and trailer, regardless of gross vehicle or combined weight, exceeding 40 feet in total length when coupled together.

As of 2016, a USDOT number issued by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) is required prior to obtaining a CA number, even for carriers only engaging in intrastate commerce. USDOT numbers can be applied for online at <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/registration-forms#USDOT-Numbers> or by calling the FMCSA at (800) 832-5660.

Carriers who had existing CA numbers prior to 2016 are also required to obtain a USDOT number. In some but not all cases, USDOT numbers were issued to such carriers. Individuals may inquire about their USDOT number status by calling CHP at (916) 843-4150.

Licensing

An individual may operate a vehicle or combination of vehicles meeting the following conditions with a Non-Commercial Class C License (CVC § 12804.9(b)(3)):

- A two-axle vehicle with a GVWR of 26,000 pounds or less.
- A vehicle or combination of a vehicle and a trailer that has a GCWR of 26,000 pounds or less so long as the vehicle and/or vehicle and trailer operate under the following conditions:
 - Operated exclusively by a farmer, rancher or employee of a farmer or rancher or an instructor credentialed in agriculture employed at a high school, community college or university.
 - Not used in a for-hire capacity (an individual is not compensated to haul cattle or other agriculture commodities or equipment). For-hire does not include hauling your own livestock to market.

- Used exclusively in agriculture. This does not include hauling non-agricultural goods, equipment, etc., in a livestock trailer or on a flatbed trailer.
- A two-axle vehicle when towing a trailer with a GVWR of 15,000 pounds or less so long as the following conditions are met:
 - The trailer is used exclusively for recreational purposes and is used for the transportation of property, human habitation, or both.
 - The operator has passed a specialized written DMV examination regarding the towing of recreational vehicles.
 - The towing of the trailer is not for compensation or commercial purposes.
 - The trailer is coupled to the towing vehicle using a bed mounted gooseneck hitch or fifth-wheel connection.

An individual hauling cattle or agricultural products for compensation, having a truck and trailer combination with a GCWR of more than 26,000 pounds or otherwise not meeting the criteria above is generally required to have a Commercial Class A License.

Individuals with a Class A license must adhere to different blood alcohol standards when operating any vehicle and, with some exceptions, must undergo routine physicals in order to maintain the license.

Obtaining a Class A Commercial Driver's License (CDL) in California requires completing the following process:

- Apply for a CDL Learners Permit - Applicants must complete a required medical examination and pass a written knowledge test(s). The exact number of tests depends on which endorsements (e.g. airbrakes, tanker, ect..) that the applicant seeks to obtain.
- Complete the Federal Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) - Effective February 2022, individuals obtaining an original CDL are required to complete a certified ELDT course. Certified providers can be found on FMCSA's Training Provider Registry.
- Complete 15 hours of behind-the-wheel training and submit a California Commercial Driver Behind The Wheel Training Certification - Pursuant to CVC § 15250.1(b), California Class A or B CDL applicants are required to complete and record 15 hours of behind-the-wheel training and submitting the record using DMV form DL 1236.
- Complete the CDL Skills Test - Applicants must complete the behind-the-wheel skills test in the type of vehicle and/or combination they wish to be licensed to operate.

Basic Inspection of Terminals & Highway Weigh Stations

California law requires certain vehicles to undergo an in-depth safety inspection conducted by a CHP commercial enforcement officer at least once every six years. Owners of applicable vehicles must pay an annual fee to enroll in the BIT program beginning at \$130 per vehicle. Generally, vehicles subject to BIT include motor trucks, not defined as pickups, with a GVWR greater than 11,500 lbs. or modified to carry a flatbed, utility body, etc. and truck and trailer combinations exceeding 40 ft. in length regardless of weight or the configuration of the truck bed.

Fortunately, CCA was successful in sponsoring and passing AB 1960 (Lackey, 2016) and AB 2415 (Lackey, 2022) into law which exempt most agricultural vehicles from the BIT program. Trucks and truck and trailer combinations are exempt from BIT if they meet the following conditions:

- The GCWR of the pickup and trailer combination does not exceed 26,000 lbs.
- When operated in commerce, the vehicle or vehicle combination are used solely in agricultural operations (trucks operated for both private use and a farming or ranching business will remain exempt).
- The vehicle or vehicle combination is not used in a for-hire capacity.
- The vehicle or vehicle combination are used solely in intrastate commerce.
- The truck or towing vehicle has a GVWR less than 16,000 lbs.

So long as the above conditions are met, pickups with flatbeds, utility bodies, etc. and those vehicle combinations exceeding 40 ft. in combined length will remain exempt.

Federal and state law also require those operating motor trucks to pass through highway inspection stations. In California, these are operated and manned by the CHP and require a driver to pass over a scale to ensure the actual weight of the vehicle and whatever is being towed falls within the permitted weight or declared weight fees of the vehicle.

Vehicles or vehicle combinations required to pass through CHP inspection sites are (CVC § 2813):

- A vehicle with a GVWR of more than 11,500 pounds, including some three-quarter-ton and one-ton trucks with standard box type beds based on their weight regardless of whether a trailer is being towed.
- Any vehicle with a flatbed, utility box or another bed configuration that does not include the original “box-type” bed installed by the manufacturer regardless of whether a trailer is being towed.

Blood Alcohol Content

Drivers of vehicles or vehicle combinations that must be operated using a commercial Class A License are held to a different Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) standard of .04 percent compared to .08 percent which is the general BAC limit for all California drivers. To determine whether your vehicle or vehicle and trailer combination requires a commercial Class A License to be operated legally, please refer to the licensing section of this fact sheet.

Air Quality

The California Air Resources Board's (ARB's) Periodic Smoke Inspection Program (PSIP) requires certain diesel vehicles with a GVWR of more than 6,000 pounds to conduct an annual smoke opacity test at a licensed facility. 1998 and newer diesel vehicles with a GVWR of more than 6,000 pounds but less than 14,000 pounds are exempt from PSIP and instead are subject to California's smog check program.

Diesel vehicles with a GVWR of greater than 14,000 pounds are regulated under the statewide diesel Truck and Bus Regulation adopted by ARB in 2008. Beginning in 2023, diesel vehicles with a GVWR of 14,000 pounds or more must have an engine model year of 2010 or newer. Such vehicles with engine model years older than 2010 will be denied registration from the DMV. However, certain types of vehicles are excluded from the regulation and may be eligible for DMV registration by reporting this exclusion using the Excluded Diesel Vehicle Reporting (EDVR) system. Excluded vehicles include:

- Pickup trucks with a GVWR of 19,500 pounds or less with a pickup bed used exclusively for personal, non-commercial or non-governmental use.
- Vehicles used exclusively for towing a habitable trailer for non-commercial private use and motorhomes.

For diesel vehicles subject to the Truck and Bus Regulations, a low-use vehicle exemption is available for vehicles which operate fewer than 1,000 miles and 100 hours per calendar year. Vehicle mileage and operating hours must be reported annually to claim the exemption. Mileage and hours accrued in support of emergency activities, such as wildfires, floods or other natural disasters, do not count towards the annual total.

In 2022, ARB adopted a regulation requiring all new cars and light-duty trucks sold in the state beginning in 2035 to be equipped with a zero-emission engine. The regulation will not impact vehicle owners of gas-powered vehicles purchased prior to 2035. While the regulation applies to light-duty trucks – defined by ARB as those with a GVWR of 8,500 pounds or less – the zero-emission mandate does not apply to medium-duty trucks (defined by ARB as those with a GVWR of 8,501-14,000 pounds), though the regulation does propose “low-emission vehicle” targets for medium-duty trucks. Heavy-duty trucks – those with a GVWR of 14,001 or more pounds – are likewise not mandated to be zero-emission by 2035, though Governor Newsom has issued an Executive Order stating that it is the “goal of the State that 100 percent of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles in the State be zero-emission by 2045...where feasible.”

Log Books & Hours of Service Restrictions

California law requires that operators of certain vehicles keep a detailed log of the hours they operate the vehicle in order to comply with federal and state restrictions on how many hours these vehicles can operate.

Generally speaking, under California law operators are limited to 12 hours of driving before taking a mandatory 10-hour break before operating the vehicle again, but restrictions are different for those operating in interstate or intrastate commerce and may vary depending on a range of other conditions, such as adverse weather. A detailed overview of the federal hours of service restrictions can be found at <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/hours-of-service>; information regarding California’s hours of service rules can be found at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/legal-truck-access/safety>.

Operators of vehicles identified below are required to adhere to the hours of service restrictions and keep detailed log books (CVC § 21702):

- A truck and trailer, regardless of gross vehicle or combined weight, exceeding 40 feet in total length when coupled together.
- A truck with a GVWR of more than 11,500 pounds, including some three-quarter-ton and one-ton trucks with standard box type beds based on their weight, regardless of whether a trailer is being towed.
- Any vehicle with a flatbed, utility box or another bed configuration that does not include the original “box-type” bed installed by the manufacturer regardless of whether a trailer is being towed.

Interstate Commerce

California administers many of the same programs required by the federal government for individuals operating only in California. As soon as an individual crosses state lines with a motor truck, certain federal requirements and permits may also be required.

Anyone operating in interstate commerce should visit the U.S. Department of Transportation’s website (<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration>) to determine if the vehicle must be registered with the department. Most licensing, permits, etc., required at the state level will suffice when applying.

This guide was last updated in October 2023 and serves as a basic overview to address the common transportation issues agriculture faces in California. It may not address very specific or unique situations. For help with other transportation issues not found here, please contact the Rancher Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) at (916) 409-6902 or rtap@wrstrat.com. RTAP is provided by the California Cattlemen’s Foundation and funded by the California Cattle Council. For more details on receiving assistance from the California Cattlemen Foundation’s Rancher Technical Assistance program at no cost, visit <https://www.calcattlemenfoundation.org/rtap>.