

Motor Vehicle Division Information Memo # 19-20

2019 Legislation – Blackout License Plates

DATE: June 17, 2019

FROM: Sara Siedsma, Compliance Officer, MVD

TO: All Vehicle and Motor Carrier Services staff, Iowa County Treasurers and County Treasurer's staff

SUBJECT

This informational memo explains legislation enacted during the 2019 legislative session requiring us to create a new "blackout" license plate.

SUMMARY

Division VII of Senate File 638 requires us to create a new blackout license plate. The blackout license plate shall have a black background with white letters and numbers. The first-time fee for the blackout plate shall be \$35 above the regular costs for a plate, and there is an additional \$25 first-time fee for a personalized blackout plate. The fees for the new blackout plate will be deposited into the Road Use Tax Fund (RUTF) and the RUTF is a fund dedicated to the construction, maintenance, and supervision of roads and bridges at the state, county, and city level. **The legislation is effective July 1, 2019.**

LINK TO LEGISLATION

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LGE/88/SF638.pdf>

CURRENT

Current law does not address the creation of a blackout plate, although we currently produce a license plate for Dordt College that has a black background with white letters and numbers.

NEW

The new legislation requires us to create a new blackout license plate that contains a black background with white letters and numbers.

BUSINESS IMPACT

This directive will require us to produce a new blackout license plate that will be available for order beginning July 1, 2019. We will be updating the license plate application and the DOT website prior to July 1, 2019 to include the new blackout plate.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following questions and answers provide additional information that will be helpful to you and to customers.

WHY WAS THE BLACKOUT LICENSE PLATE CREATED?

The legislature created this plate to meet the demands of vehicle owners that like the look of a plate with an all-black background. Many customers were buying Dordt College plates and

covering the Dordt name and insignia with a separately purchased plate frame; this plate allows the customer to instead directly purchase an all-black plate.

WHEN MAY A CUSTOMER APPLY FOR A NEW BLACKOUT LICENSE PLATE?

We will begin taking orders for the new blackout license plate on July 1, 2019.

WHEN WILL NEW BLACKOUT PLATES BE PRODUCED AND DELIVERED?

Iowa Prison Industries is already preparing for production of the new plates. We expect that deliveries will start within 3-5 weeks of initial orders in early July and that future delivery will be the same as for any other special plate.

WHAT ARE THE FEES FOR A BLACKOUT LICENSE PLATE?

The first-time fee for the blackout plate shall be \$35 above the regular costs for a plate, and there is an additional \$25 first-time fee for a personalized blackout plate. The annual renewal fee for a non-personalized blackout plate is \$10, and for a personalized blackout plate is \$15. The special annual renewal fees for blackout plates are in addition to the regular annual registration fee.

ARE THE FEES FOR A BLACKOUT LICENSE PLATE DIFFERENT FOR A MOTORCYCLE?

No. The fees for the blackout plate for a motorcycle are the same as a regular-sized blackout plate.

MAY COUNTIES ORDER AND STOCK STANDARD (NON-PERSONALIZED) BLACKOUT PLATES?

VMCS will work with counties to monitor customer orders for non-personalized blackout plates over the first few months of availability. If demand is sufficiently high and sustained (meaning it does not drop significantly after the first few weeks) then VMCS will determine if and how to provide stock of standard plates to all or selected counties.

WHAT IS THE COST AND PROCESS TO SWITCH FROM THE DORDT COLLEGE PLATE (OR ANY OTHER STANDARD OR SPECIAL PLATE) TO THE BLACKOUT PLATE?

The application process and payment of \$35 for the blackout plate is the same regardless of the type of plate that a customer currently uses or whether it is a new registration.

If a customer currently has a special plate but chooses to order a new blackout plate at the time of registration, the customer would be charged \$35 for the new plate. At the customer's next renewal, they would be charged the renewal fee for the blackout plate.

WHAT IF A CUSTOMER REFUSES DELIVERY OF ANOTHER SPECIAL PLATE TO INSTEAD PURCHASE THE BLACKOUT PLATE?

If a customer currently has a special plate on order but refuses delivery to instead purchase a blackout plate, then the county should assist the customer in applying to the Iowa DOT for a refund and start a new transaction for the purchase of the blackout plate.

If, however, a customer has accepted delivery of the first special plate, then the procedure listed above to switch to the blackout plate would apply.

WHAT DOES THE TERM “BLACKOUT” STAND FOR?

The term “blackout” merely describes an all-black plate, it has no other meaning and is not associated with any message or movement.

DO YOU HAVE A SAMPLE OF WHAT THE NEW BLACKOUT LICENSE PLATE WILL LOOK LIKE?

VMCS will display the following image on its license plates web page and provide artwork to counties:



WHAT IF A CUSTOMER ALTERS THIS OR ANY OTHER PLATE?

Iowa Code 321.37(3) states “It is unlawful for the owner of a vehicle to place any frame around or over the registration plate which does not permit full view of all numerals and letters printed on the registration plate.” Iowa Code 321.96(1) also prohibits a person from displaying “altered ... registration number plates...”. Any such violation could result in a citation by law enforcement.