

# So You Want To Customize Your Vehicle?

Many vehicle accessories are street legal but some may **NOT** be, so take a minute and read this over. It may not only save you an encounter with a law enforcement officer, but could also save you some cash!

Accessory	Vehicle Code(s)	Rule / Interpretation	Rationale
<b>Is a front license plate required?</b>	ORS 803.525 Number of plates. 803.540 Failure to display plates. Class D traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always require a front and back plate on a passenger vehicle. (Mopeds, motorcycles, trailers, campers, antique and specialty vehicles require only one plate.)</li> <li>Must be firmly secured, visible &amp; legible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>License plates are reflectorized and if a vehicle is stranded or disabled on a highway the plate will reflect the lights of an oncoming vehicle. This gives the driver of the oncoming vehicle an opportunity to recognize the hazard.</li> <li>Helps police identify oncoming vehicles.</li> </ul>
<b>Are license plate lights required? What about neon license plate lights?</b>	ORS 816.090 Registration plate lights. ORS 816. Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A white license plate light is required.</li> <li>Must illuminate the license plate so that it can be read from 50 feet behind.</li> <li>Must be wired to come on when the headlights or parking lights are on.</li> <li>No additional lamp or equipment that impairs the effectiveness of the required lamps are permitted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White light enhances the visibility of the license plate during low light conditions and light is to be projected toward the plate.</li> <li>Neon license plate lamps may impair the ability to read the plate from 50 feet behind.</li> </ul>
<b>Are license plate covers permitted?</b>	ORS 803.550 Illegal alteration or display of plates. Class B traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any material or covering, other than a frame or plate holder, placed on, over or in front of the plate that alters the appearance of the plate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tinted and non-tinted plate covers can alter the appearance of or the reflectivity of the plate and make it unreadable or reduce the reflectivity for safety purposes.</li> </ul>
<b>What are legal bumper heights?</b>	Oregon has no bumper height laws, but all lights must fall within the standards set by FMVSS 108.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Headlights: between 22 and 54 inches from the road surface.</li> <li>Tail &amp; brake lights: between 15 and 72 inches from the road surface.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heights other than these limits for lights can create safety issues with glare from lights and potential dangerous over-ride issues during crashes.</li> </ul>
<b>How low can a car be lowered?</b>	ORS 815.245 Violation of minimum clearance requirements for passenger vehicles. Class B traffic violation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A vehicle may not have less clearance from the surface of a level roadway than the clearance between the roadway and the lowest portion of any rim of any wheel in contact with the roadway.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lowered vehicles may get hung up on uneven road surfaces or may not be able to enter or leave driveways or traverse railway crossings. This may cause crashes or tie up traffic waiting to remove the lowered vehicle from an obstruction.</li> </ul>
<b>Are turn signal, tail-light and headlight covers permitted?</b>	ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oregon adopted FMVSS 108 which disallows the use of light covers on required lighting equipment when lights are required to be in use. Light covers on turn signals, taillights and brake lights are not permitted as these lights are always in use. Headlight covers may not be used when headlights are required to be in use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covers reduce the size and impair the effectiveness of the lamps and reflectors required by the regulations.</li> <li>Covers reduce the amount of light transmitted in some cases by over 30%. Reduction of light decreases the amount of time a driver has to react to an object.</li> <li>Covers reduce visibility to other road users.</li> </ul>
<b>Are clear tail lamp lenses permitted?</b>	ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Signal</u> lamps must emit either amber or red light. <u>Brake</u> lamps must emit red. <u>Tail</u> lamps and the required reflex reflectors (usually a part of the red lamp lens) must emit red. <u>Side marker</u> lamps and side reflex reflectors must emit red. Clear tail lamp covers only permitted where all of the above requirements are met.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually the clear tail lamp lens does not include side marker lamps or any <b>red</b> reflex reflectors as required.</li> <li>Identifies the rear of the vehicle.</li> <li>Ensures optimum visibility to other road users.</li> <li>LED bulbs can emit the required color and comply.</li> </ul>
<b>Are blue or purple dot inserts in taillights legal?</b>	ORS 816.080 Taillights. ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On a motor vehicle that was manufactured before 1959, the taillight or taillight assembly, if the taillight is combined with another light, may contain a blue or purple insert of not more than one inch in diameter.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taillights with blue or purple inserts emit an unusual purplish light that is not usually attributed to tail and brake lights and can create a safety issue.</li> </ul>
<b>Are colored (blue, green etc.) headlight bulbs permitted?</b>	ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation. ORS 816.050 Headlights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All headlamps must be WHITE in color as defined by Society of Automotive Engineers and FMVSS 108. White lamps have been tested to meet all headlamp requirements.</li> <li>Maximum wattage allowed in a headlamp is 70 watts.</li> <li>FMVSS 108 disallows any color coating on headlights and/or headlight bulbs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blue and green lamps are designated for use on emergency vehicles only.</li> <li>Red lamps to front are reserved for emergency vehicles and school bus warning lamps.</li> <li>Colored bulbs give a distorted headlamp pattern, which may prevent the driver from seeing a person or object at the road edge or starting to cross the road.</li> </ul>
<b>Are under-car glow lamp kits (neon lights) permitted? How about windshield washer and valve stem lights?</b>	ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All lighting equipment for road use in Oregon must meet FMVSS 108 standards. Neon lights of any type, windshield washer lights and valve stem lights have not met these standards and are not legal for use on Oregon's roadways. Flashing red and blue lights may only be used by emergency vehicles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lamps that emit a red, blue or green light are for use on emergency vehicles only.</li> <li>Check lighting equipment for disclaimers. If they are marketed for "Off-road Use Only", "For Show Use Only" or something like: "Check local laws and ordinances for use." This is an indicator that the product is not legal for roadway use.</li> </ul>
<b>When are fog lamps permitted?</b>	ORS 811.515 When lights must be displayed; kind of light; number; direction; use on certain vehicles. ORS 811.520 Unlawful use or failure to use lights. Class B traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fog lamps may only be used when high beams lights are allowed.</li> <li>Must be properly aimed (see Oregon Administrative Rule 735-108-0073).</li> <li>Must be amber lights and must be approved for street use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restricted use and aiming avoids reduction of visibility for oncoming drivers.</li> </ul>

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE→

Accessory	Vehicle Code(s)	Rule / Interpretation	Rationale
<b>Does a windshield with cracks and damage need to be replaced?</b>	ORS 815.020 Operation of an unsafe vehicle. Class B traffic violation. ORS 815.220 Obstruction of vehicle windows. Class D traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anything that prohibits or impairs the ability to see into or out of the vehicle is a violation of ORS 815.220.</li> <li>If a cracked or broken windshield is in the drivers line of vision it should be repaired/replaced.</li> <li>Vehicles sold by a dealer or private party must have all safety equipment including windows in proper working safe condition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These standards ensure the driver's visibility is not obstructed and the windshield is structurally sound. Windshields are an integral part of the unibody design that directs forces (energy) away from the driver in a crash.</li> <li>A cracked or broken windshield impairs the ability to see other objects.</li> <li>A damaged windshield reduces load carrying capacity of the windshield.</li> </ul>
<b>Is after-market window tinting or decals permitted on a window?</b>	ORS 815.221 Tinting: authorized and prohibited materials; certificate. ORS 815.222 Illegal window tinting. Class B traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Windshields may have tint only in the top 6 inches of the windshield.</li> <li>All windows except the windshield must have a minimum of 35% light transmittance and a reflectivity of 13% or less.</li> <li>SUVs, pickups, vans, limousines and other multipurpose vehicles may have darker tinted (privacy glass) for windows behind the driver.</li> <li>A certificate must be provided by the person tinting vehicle windows stating the tint and reflectivity in each window, the tinter's name and date the tint was applied. This certificate must be kept in the vehicle at all times.</li> <li>Physicians or optometrists may sign affidavits for darker tint for persons with physical conditions requiring darker tinting. This affidavit and the certificate mentioned above must be kept in the car at all times. This darker tint must be removed prior to resale of the vehicle.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After market material may lower the level of light transmission through windows which could affect a driver's ability to see unlit objects and pedestrians in low light conditions and increase the probability of a collision.</li> <li>The application of a film on the glass changes the characteristics of automotive glass, including how the glass shatters.</li> <li>Dark film on the windows of a vehicle may jeopardize a police officer's safety.</li> <li>Decals may obstruct the driver's view.</li> </ul>
<b>Is one windshield wiper permitted?</b>	ORS 815.215 Failure to have windshield wipers. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vehicle must be equipped with the same number of wipers that came with the vehicle as original equipment from the manufacturer. (Motorcycles, vehicles of special interest, street rods, and antique vehicles may have exemptions from the windshield wiper(s) requirement.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Required to provide clear view to the driver when operating in poor weather conditions.</li> </ul>
<b>Are less restrictive flow (loud) mufflers / exhaust systems or noise enhancing attachments permitted?</b>	ORS 815.250 Operation without proper exhaust system. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vehicle must be equipped with a muffler that meets the following noise levels:</li> <li>Motor vehicles: before 1976, 94 dBA</li> <li>Motor vehicles 1976 &amp; after, 91 dBA</li> <li>Motorcycles before 1976, 94 dBA</li> <li>Motorcycles 1976, 91 dBA</li> <li>Motorcycles after 1976, 89 dBA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emission of any loud or unnecessary noise from a motor vehicle is prohibited.</li> <li>Less restrictive exhaust systems may not meet exhaust emission standards.</li> <li>Permitted dB levels vary according to vehicle type and year of manufacture.</li> <li>Removal of catalytic converters is not permitted by state and federal emission laws.</li> </ul>
<b>Are after-market exhaust headers permitted?</b>	ORS 815.250 Operation without proper exhaust system. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Headers are permitted providing the rest of the exhaust system, including legal mufflers and catalytic converter (if required), is in compliance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less restrictive exhaust systems may not meet exhaust emission standards.</li> <li>Permitted dB levels vary according to vehicle type and year of manufacture.</li> </ul>
<b>Are wide tires permitted?</b>	ORS 815.180 Mudguards and Fenders Standards. ORS 815.185 Operation without proper fenders or mudguards. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A fender, mudflap or body overhang that reduces the rearward projection of gravel, mud, water and snow from each tire is required. This must extend the full width of the tire tread.</li> <li>For non-commercial vehicles, the fender, mudguard/mudflap or body overhang must cover the complete width of the tire tread and come within 27 inches of the road surface behind all tires.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protects motorist visibility that could otherwise be reduced from spray from another vehicle.</li> <li>Protects motorists from inadvertently discharging road debris (rocks, dirt, sand, etc.) into the path of other motorists.</li> </ul>
<b>Can a smaller steering wheel be installed?</b>	ORS 167.822 Improper repair of vehicle inflatable restraint system. Class A misdemeanor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the vehicle was manufactured with an air bag restraint system, that system must be retained in the vehicle and must be in good operating condition when the vehicle is sold.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oregon adopted the federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards for occupant restraint systems, including air bags. They must be maintained in good working condition. This is a safety issue for the driver and passengers.</li> </ul>
<b>Can I install an interior lamp kit? (neon bulbs etc.)</b>	ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interior lamps are not specifically addressed but distractions to other road users are not permitted. If a lamp kit is installed the emitted light should not reduce the driver's vision and not emit light that can be seen by other road users while the vehicle is moving, especially if the light is one that is only allowed for use by emergency vehicles (red, blue, green).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lights that reduce the driver's vision, or are a distraction to other motorists may contribute to a crash.</li> <li>These types of interior lamp kits may be misconstrued as emergency vehicle lights by other roadway users.</li> </ul>
<b>Can a motorcycle have a flashing brake light?</b>	ORS 816.100 Brake lights. ORS 816.360 Use of prohibited lighting equipment. Class C traffic violation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brake lights on all vehicles must emit a steady burning red light. (See Update at right for new information.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motorcycle brake lights may flash intermittently, provided that the brake lights do not override the rear turn signal function.</li> </ul>

There are some special allowances and or exemptions for vehicles that are registered and plated as antique vehicles, hot rods, vehicles of special interest, and for road machinery, and implements of husbandry (farm tractors and machinery). For additional information please contact: Vehicle Equipment Standards Program, Transportation Safety Division, Oregon Department of Transportation, 235 Union Street NE, Salem, OR 98301-1054, or call (503) 986-4198, or visit the Vehicle Equipment Standards web page at: [http://www.odot.state.or.us/transafety/Veh\\_Equipment.htm](http://www.odot.state.or.us/transafety/Veh_Equipment.htm)