

FLORIDA AUTOMOBILE REGISTRATION AND LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

Automobile Registration

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940, as amended, protects active duty military members who comply with the motor vehicle registration requirements of their home states from having to reregister their vehicles in the states where they are stationed pursuant to military orders. Therefore, there is no requirement for an active duty airman stationed at Tyndall Air Force base to obtain a Florida registration for his or her vehicle, as long as that vehicle is properly registered in his or her home state. However, the protections of the Act do not extend to spouses or other dependants of military members.

Nevertheless, a military spouse or dependant does not have to register his or her vehicle in the state of Florida if he or she does not become a resident of Florida and does not work in Florida because Florida law exempts nonresidents from motor vehicle registration requirements. In order to get the benefit of this exemption, the vehicle must be properly registered in the individual's state of residence. Additionally, the nonresident exemption does not apply to vehicles used for commercial purposes or to recreational vehicles or mobile homes located in the state of Florida for at least 6 months.

Nonresident military members and spouses will have to obtain a Florida registration for their motor vehicles if they accept employment in Florida. This applies both to off-duty employment for the military member, and any employment in the surrounding area for the nonmilitary spouse. The statute also states that nonresidents who enroll their children in the public school system must register their vehicles in Florida; it is unclear whether this rule would be applied to military members who enroll their children in Florida public schools because their dependants accompanied them to Tyndall Air Force Base.

Additionally, all Florida residents must obtain a Florida registration for their vehicles. Therefore, if a military member changes his or her residency to a Florida residency, he or she must register his or her vehicles in Florida and obtain a Florida driver's license. Commonly, military members will change their residency to Florida residency to avoid paying state income taxes in their home state, or to take advantage of Florida's homestead exemption. When considering whether it would be advantageous to switch your residency to Florida, you should consider that registering your vehicles in Florida can initially be quite an expensive proposition.

Florida requires that cars be registered annually. The period of registration begins on the vehicle owner's birthday and continues for one year. You must pay the fee for an entire year even if your registration will only cover a small portion of the year. For example, if you arrive at Tyndall in April and your birthday is in October, you will have to pay the registration fee for an entire year even though your registration will expire on your birthday in October. If the car is co-owned, the registration period will run one year from the birthday of the individual whose name appears first on the title and registration. Annual registration fees can run as high as \$154.60, depending on the weight of your vehicle. Additionally, the first time you register your vehicle in Florida you will have to pay a one-time \$100 initial registration fee. Furthermore, if you purchase your vehicle outside of Florida and then bring it into Florida within 6 months of

purchase you must pay sales tax consisting of 6% of the purchase price, minus the value of any trade in, plus an additional \$50 fee. You do not have to pay this tax if you paid more than 6% sales tax when you bought the vehicle. If you paid sales tax, but it was less than you would have paid in Florida, you will have to pay Florida the difference.

Nonresident military members may register their cars in Florida as nonresidents if they no longer wish to keep their car registered in their home state, do not desire to become Florida residents, and want to avoid paying the high vehicle registration fees Florida requires. Military members in Florida pursuant to military orders are eligible for this reduced fee vehicle registration, which costs approximately \$23.60. Nonresidents do not have to pay the \$100 initial registration fee either. In order to pay the reduced rate you must bring the Vehicle Registration Department a copy of your LES or military orders that shows your home of residence.

In order to register your car in Florida, you will need to bring your driver's license, proof of Florida insurance, and the title to your vehicle to the Vehicle Registration Department, often located at the local tax collector's office. You also must bring the vehicle being registered with you so that its VIN can be verified. Remember, if you want to register as a nonresident to avoid paying the high registration fees, you must also bring a military ID card and recent LES or copy of your orders showing your home of residence.

Driver's Licenses

All Florida residents must obtain a Florida driver's license if they wish to drive in Florida. Military members and their dependants who are residents of another state but are stationed in Florida do not need to obtain a Florida driver's license if they have a valid and current driver's license from their state of legal residence. However, military members and their dependants stationed in Florida must obtain a Florida license if:

1. The service member or spouse claims the Florida homestead exemption. In this case, all drivers in the family must obtain Florida driver's licenses.
2. The service member gets a part-time job or other off duty employment in Florida. The member has 30 days from the start of Florida employment to obtain a Florida license.
3. If the military member's spouse or child becomes employed in Florida, then that spouse or child will need to obtain a Florida driver's license within 30 days of the start of his or her employment.

The fee for a Florida driver's license is \$20. The fee is the same whether you are transferring a license from another state or whether you are getting a license for the first time. The renewal fee is \$15. To exchange your out of state license for a Florida license, you must bring your out of state license and one other form of identification with you to the Driver's License Office. You will also have to take a vision test. To get a license for the first time, you will have to take a drug and alcohol safety class, take a written driver's test, take a driving test, and have your vision checked.

Additional Information

The nearest Driver's License Office and Vehicle Registration Department to Tyndall Air Force base are located in Parker at:

Driver's License Office

5420 N. Lakewood Drive, Parker

Tel. 872-4486

Hours: Tues-Fri 0700-1800

Vehicle Registration Department

5416 N. Lakewood Drive, Parker

Tel. 872-4657

Hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1700

Additional information concerning driver's licenses and vehicle registration in Florida, as well as the whereabouts of additional office locations, is available on-line at:

<http://www.hsmv.state.fl.us/dhsmv/newflres.html>