



# FAQs about International Driving Permits, International Driver Licenses & Driving Privileges for Foreign Licensed Drivers

The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV)

Updated April 2004

The RMV has been receiving an increasing number of inquiries from police officers and court officials seeking information as to what an International Driving Permit or International Driver's License is, and what rights, if any, they grant to an operator who seeks to drive on Massachusetts roadways. We also receive questions about the right of foreign licensed drivers to operate motor vehicles in Massachusetts. We hope this summary is helpful.

International Driving Permits and International Driver Licenses have come under more intense scrutiny recently with the proliferation of Internet sites advertising these documents as a way to avoid taking license tests or to subvert license revocations. Some Internet sites advertise documents for sale that are fraudulently marketed as an "International Driving Permit" or an "International License." The web sites selling these documents try to convince prospective buyers that the documents actually confer driving privileges. Some say it is the United Nations that grants privileges to drive throughout the world - to add legitimacy to their pitch. These fraudulent documents are marketed with the intent to mislead the purchaser, and ultimately a police officer, as to the privileges the document confers or the driver's right to operate a motor vehicle. Some individuals have paid hundreds of dollars for such documents. However these documents are not recognized in any jurisdiction as a legal license to operate a motor vehicle. An internet site that offers to provide a driver license or identification document from a particular U.S. state or territory for a fee, which does not appear to be an authorized website for the official U.S. state or territory known to be the issuer of such documents, should be reported to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

For an e-mail advertisement coming from outside of Massachusetts (out-of-state address or tel.no.) contact the:

**Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or send to:  
FTC, 600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20580; and/or  
**U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ)** [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov) or send to:  
USDOJ, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

For an e-mail advertisement coming from within Massachusetts (in-state address or tel.no.) send a written complaint with a copy of the ad to: *Office of the Attorney General, One Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108 or call 617-727-8400.*

In the opinion of the Registry of Motor Vehicles, in instances where the operator is otherwise unlicensed or under suspension or revocation, or where his or her right to operate in the Commonwealth has been suspended or revoked, the possession of an International Driving Permit or International Driver's License has no legal effect.

Here are some typical Questions and Answers that may be helpful.

## **Q** #1. What is an International Driving Permit (IDP)?

**A** An **International Driving Permit** serves primarily as a translation of a person's foreign driver's license into ten (10) major languages recognized by the United Nations. The Permit itself is a small (4" X 6"), gray covered, multi-page booklet with white pages, containing the driver's first and last name, the date and place of birth and the person's permanent address in the country of issuance. A Permit also contains a photograph of the driver and his/her signature. Other than the page containing the personal information and photograph, each page conveys the same information but in a separate language.

## **Q** #2. Who issues International Driving Permits?

**A** Permits are only issued in the driver's country of origin and only by a membership-type automobile association authorized to issue such Permits by an International Road Traffic Convention to which the United States is a party. A fee is charged for the issuance of the Permit. The cost is about \$10. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA) issue International Driving Permits to licensed drivers from U.S. jurisdictions who intend on driving in other countries. An International Driving Permit is usually valid for a one (1) year period and is not valid in the country of issuance.



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**Q #3. Does an International Driving Permit confer driving privileges in Massachusetts?**

**A** No. It does *not* confer any driving privileges. The Permit is *not* a substitute for the person's valid driver license. A driver who is licensed in another country *must* carry his/her valid foreign driver license when driving in Massachusetts. The operator should also carry an INS document which shows the date that the operator last entered the U.S. The valid I-94 containing the date of admission to the U.S. should be sufficient.

**Q #4. Is a foreign licensed driver required to carry an International Driving Permit (IDP) when driving in Massachusetts?**

**A** No. Although some countries require a foreign motorist to possess an IDP, the United States has not done so. It is suggested, however, that he/she carry an IDP if the foreign license is not printed in the English language.

**Q #5. Does Massachusetts honor valid foreign driver licenses from every country?**

**A** No. Massachusetts will only honor valid licenses from countries identified in Appendix "C" of the current Massachusetts Driver's Manual. Appendix "C" is re-printed here for your review. Most of the identified countries are parties to one of the two major international road or automotive traffic conventions the U.S. recognizes. Germany and Switzerland are not parties to the 1949 Road Traffic Convention but their driver licenses are honored based on reciprocal agreements. At present, validly licensed drivers from some of the former USSR republics are also recognized. **Note: Some countries that issue International Driving Permits include in the Permit a list of countries in which the holder is authorized to drive. Be aware that other Road Traffic Conventions that the U.S. is not a party to (such as the 1968 Convention) have a more expansive list of countries. You should be guided by the countries listed in Appendix "C."**

**Q #6. What is an International Driver's License and how does it differ from an International Driving Permit?**

**A** The RMV does not recognize as valid any document purporting to be an *International Driver's License*, or any other document that confers driving privileges, **unless issued by the government agency that issues such licenses in the driver's country of residence and the driver is validly licensed in that country.** The governments of some countries issue an international version of their own domestic driver license to their validly licensed drivers who indicate a need for a driver's license that will be recognized in other countries. The international version of the domestic driver license includes translations (usually including into English). The Federal Republic of Germany, and Switzerland issue such a license. Since Germany and Switzerland are recognized in Appendix "C" of the Massachusetts Driver's Manual, we honor both the domestic and International version of their respective licenses as conferring driving privileges. Even if a country issues an international version of its own domestic license, the license will only be honored in Massachusetts if the country is identified in Appendix "C." Remember, a foreign driver cannot drive in Massachusetts unless his/her driver's license is issued by the government of a country identified in Appendix "C." A validly issued International Driving Permit, while not required, merely serves to confirm that a license was issued and translates the relevant information on the license. It is not a substitute for a valid license and the license must be carried when operating in Massachusetts.

Caution: AAA and AATA usually require the applicant to produce the driver license before they will issue an IDP. Typically, however, they do not have access to information indicating whether the license has been suspended or revoked.

**Q #7. Does the one year of eligibility to drive begin each time the person re-enters the US?**

**A** Yes. The year of eligibility to drive in Massachusetts begins again each time the foreign visitor lawfully re-enters the US.



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### ***Driving Privileges for NATO Forces:***

Massachusetts is legally required to honor the provisions of the **Agreement Between The Parties To The North Atlantic Treaty Regarding the Status of Forces**, ( NATO SOFA) entered into by the US on August 23, 1953. The Treaty accords driving privileges to active duty military members of NATO forces on assignment in this country (usually for training purposes) and also to civilian components attached to the NATO forces. Therefore, Massachusetts accepts as valid, without a driving test or fee, the driving permit, license or military driving permit issued by a NATO country to its own military personnel or to the personnel of a civilian component of the military force. **NATO military and civilian component personnel are required to carry and present on demand:** (a) a personal identity card issued by the sending NATO country showing names, date of birth, rank and number (if any), service, and photograph. (b) an individual or collective movement order, in the language of the sending country and in the English and French languages, issued by an agency of the sending country or NATO and certifying to the status of the individual or group as a member or members of a force and to the movement ordered.

**Members of a civilian component and dependents shall be so described in their passports.** Dependents of military personnel of NATO force personnel on assignment in the U.S., and dependents of civilian employees assigned to those NATO forces, who are from one of the NATO member countries listed below, may legally drive on the roads of the Commonwealth, **on their home country license**, for up to one year from the date of arrival, under the Multilateral Road Traffic Convention of 1949 or applicable reciprocal agreements.

**List of NATO Member Countries:** Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

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### ***A note about Appendix “C”:***

A foreign visitor from one of the countries or territories listed in Appendix “C” may legally drive on the roads of the Commonwealth on his or her own country’s valid license (limited to a licensed driver who is at least 18 years old and limited to a vehicle of the type covered by the license) for up to one (1) year from the date of arrival. The visitor may operate his or her own private passenger vehicle if displaying valid license plates from the visitor’s country (and meeting insurance standards set by the Commonwealth if operated longer than 30 days) for up to one (1) year from the date of arrival.

Except for vehicles being operated in Massachusetts from Mexico and Canada, vehicles being operated in Massachusetts that are registered in any of the countries listed in Appendix “C” (including Germany and Switzerland) must also exhibit the *International Distinguishing Sign* on the rear exterior of the vehicle. The sign is a white oval that is obtained from the country of registration and contains one to three black letters identifying the country.

You may access the contents of the Massachusetts **Driver’s Manual** on the RMV web site at: [www.massrmv.com](http://www.massrmv.com).



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# Appendix C

Massachusetts will honor valid Driver's Licenses and Registrations issued by the following countries\*

Albania	Hungary	Singapore
Algeria	Iceland	Slovak Rep.
Argentina	India	South Africa (incl. Namibia)
Australia	Ireland	Spain (incl. African localities and provinces)
Austria	Israel	Sri Lanka
The Bahamas	Italy	Suriname
Bangladesh	Jamaica	Swaziland
Barbados	Japan	Sweden
Belgium	Jordan	Switzerland (by reciprocity)
Belize	Korea	Syrian Arab Republic
Benin	Kyrgyz Rep.	Taiwan
Botswana	Laos	Tanzania
Brazil	Lebanon	Thailand
Bulgaria	Lesotho	Togo
Cambodia	Luxembourg	Trinidad & Tobago
Canada	Macao (same as Hong Kong)	Tunisia
Central African Republic	Madagascar	Turkey
Chile	Malawi	Uganda
Colombia	Malaysia	United Kingdom (Great Britain & Northern Ireland) & Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, Baliwick of Guernsey, Isle of Man, & States of Jersey
Congo	Mali	Uruguay
Dem. Rep of Congo	Malta	Vatican City
Costa Rica	Mauritius	Venezuela
Cote d'Ivoire	Mexico	Vietnam Rep.
Cuba	Monaco	Western Samoa
Cyprus	Morocco	Zambia
Czech Rep.	Namibia	Zimbabwe
Denmark	Netherlands & Antilles and Aruba	
Dominican Republic	New Zealand	
Ecuador	Nicaragua	
Egypt	Niger	
El Salvador	Norway	(Former Republics of the USSR)
Fiji	Panama	Armenia
Finland	Papua New Guinea	Azerbaijan
France (inc. Overseas Territories)	Paraguay	Belarus
The Gambia	Peru	Kazakstan
Georgia (Republic of)	Phillippines	Moldova
Germany (by reciprocity)	Poland	Tajikistan
Ghana	Portugal (inc. Portuguese Territories)	Turkmenistan
Greece	Romania	Ukraine
Grenada	Russian Fed.	Uzbekistan
Guatemala	Rwanda	Latvia
Guyana	St. Lucia	Lithuania
Haiti	St. Vincent & Grenadines	Estonia
Honduras	San Marino	
Hong Kong (China is not a party to this treaty but has made it applicable to Hong Kong and Macao)	Senegal	
	Seychelles	
	Sierra Leone	

\* From a List of Treaties and other International Agreements of the United States in Force on January 1, 2003. The RMV reserves the right to amend this list at any time based on additional information received from the U.S. Department of State or other sources.