

License Plate Guidance

There are a few reasons why your vehicle's license plate could have failed during the safety inspection. Here are a few guidelines that inspectors must follow when inspecting vehicle license plates:

1) **License plates must be viewable and legible from 60 feet away.** How far is 60 feet? The average car is 15 feet in length, so license plates should be readable from four car lengths away. How do inspectors check to see if your plate is readable? Inspectors have to look at all aspects of your plate.

- Inspectors check that the numbers and letters aren't faded or that the paint hasn't chipped.
- Inspectors also check the reflective paint on the background of your plate. This is an important part of your license plate because the reflective paint is what allows other motorists and law enforcement officials to view your license plate during nighttime hours.
- Massachusetts Department of Transportation Registry of Motor Vehicles (MassDOT/RMV) policy prohibits paint touchups, because the license plate is manufactured with specialized reflective paint. License plates that have had any of the paint touched up by the motorist will fail the inspection.

2) **License plates must not be obstructed.** Inspectors check to make sure that nothing is obstructing the view of the license plate. This includes anything that covers any part of the registration letters and numbers.

3) **License plates must be properly fastened to the vehicle.** Inspectors check to ensure that the plate(s) are securely fastened to your vehicle. License plates must be mounted in the proper location and have the correct number of plates on the vehicle that were originally issued to them by the MassDOT/RMV.

- The expected proper location is as far to the front, and as far to the rear, of the vehicle as possible, while being in plain view and not obstructed in any way.
- The plate in the rear must also be properly illuminated when the running lights are turned on.

Replacing a damaged or missing license plates can be ordered by phone by calling the RMV's Contact Center at 857-368-8000 or toll free 800-858-3926, or by visiting an [RMV Service Center](#).