

Alabama Upgrades License Plate Production Technology

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Montgomery – Oct. 10, 2006 – Alabama motorists will, beginning today, see changes in the state's license plates.

Alabama is launching a major technology upgrade to integrate production, ordering and distribution into one comprehensive system. Alabama is the 17th state to transition to digitally produced license plates.

“The new plates will save tax dollars and provide law enforcement with increased safety and security elements. The new Digital License Plate system, when fully implemented, will provide easier, quicker service to our citizens,” said State Revenue Commissioner Tom Surtees.

Colonel W. M. Coppage, director of the Alabama Department of Public Safety, stated, “The first change vehicle owners will notice is that the new license plates will be flat, with enhanced readability digital imaging. To eliminate counterfeiting of plates, there will be an imbedded hologram and a bar code on each plate. These new plates are more reflective, which will aid readability—particularly in rain or at dusk.”

Andy Farquhar, director of the Department of Corrections' Industries Division, explained the new manufacturing benefits. “With the advent of so many demands for specialty plates, our old steel plate stamping system has become inefficient and costly. The new digital production system is extremely versatile allowing us to produce most any type of license plate in any sequence. That's highly important, given we currently have over 225 different license plate designs.”

The new digital plate-making system is installed at the Alabama Correctional Industries' tag shop at Holman Correctional Facility near Atmore, Ala.

The new digital process provides some key improvements over the traditional plate-making method. While capable of producing full-color plates, the elimination of solvent-based inks means there is no longer any hazardous waste from the plate-making process. Eliminating inks also saves energy because digital plates do not require special drying in gas-fueled ovens. And because digital plates will use lighter gauge aluminum, shipping and handling expenses will also be reduced.

“As we exhaust existing inventories of stamped plates and pre-printed sheeting, the new digital flat plates will be showing up on our vehicles,” added Mr. Farquhar.

Representative Arthur Payne, Birmingham, chair of the Legislative Oversight Committee on License Plates, stated, “Our committee has been working for several years to decrease production costs and to improve operational efficiencies at the state and county levels. At our committee’s request, Governor Riley issued a proclamation in 2003 to delay the issuance of the five-year tags by two years. By doing so, this created the cost savings so that this new system could be installed. It is a win for the taxpayer, state and local governments, and law enforcement in our communities.”

The second phase of the Digital License Plate system will add an inventory management component at the county distribution level. A bar code imprinted on the tag will eliminate overstock and understock situations in county tag offices and improve the state’s management of tag inventories.

Probate Judge Luke Cooley, Houston County, chair of the Probate Judges Association Tag and Title Committee, added, “On behalf of probate judges and license commissioners, I want to thank the Alabama Department of Revenue, the Alabama Department of Corrections, and the Legislative Oversight Committee on License Plates for this giant step in solving problems. We can reduce the lines in our offices, simplify this process and provide better service to our customers, the citizens of Alabama.”