



Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program

REPAIRCARE

The New VIN

We all think of ourselves as unique, and many transfer this thought to our vehicles. Thanks to the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), we can. Even though many cars may look alike, the VIN is a unique number assigned to every vehicle. No two are the same, just like our fingerprints. This form of identification is used for everything from stolen vehicle identification to obtaining the correct parts during vehicle service. The current 17 digit alpha numeric VIN configuration went into effect in 1981 and was intended to provide non-repeating VINs for thirty years. Since there has been an increase of large volume vehicle manufacturers requiring a unique VIN for every vehicle “Make”, the need for the amount of information displayed in the VIN has been growing, and VINs were beginning to run the chance of repeating before the 30 year time period was up in 2011. That is why 49 CFR Part 565 has been recently amended to allow the supply of VINs to remain unique and non-repeating until the year 2038. All of the changes to the VIN requirements took effect October 27, 2008. These requirements apply to vehicles produced after October 27, 2008 containing a letter “A” or “B” in the 10th position of the VIN, and all vehicles produced on or after April 30, 2009. The changes mentioned here only apply to passenger vehicles, MPVs and trucks weighing less than 10,000 lbs produced by high and low volume manufactures.

The number of vehicles a manufacturer produces annually will also determine the VIN configuration. There are two types of vehicle manufacturers, low or high volume. The federal government defines any vehicle manufacturer which produces 1,000 vehicles or less annually as a small manufacturer. Any manufacturer that produces more than 1,000 vehicles annually classifies as a large manufacturer. This means that when a vehicle manufacturer has been identified as a small manufacturer, positions 12-14 of the VIN are also part of the manufacturer identifier.

The VIN is required by federal regulations to be a 17 character code consisting of letters and numbers that is unique to a vehicle. The determination of VIN characters is mandated by federal regulations, some are manufacturer determined, and some are set in federal regulation. The VIN is divided up into four sections:

Section one: VIN Positions 1-3

This section requires three digits which identify vehicle manufacturer and vehicle type when the vehicle is produced by a high volume manufacturer. If the vehicle is produced by a low volume manufacturer, VIN positions 1-3 in addition to positions 12-14 are used for identification of vehicle manufacturer and type. If a “9” is placed in position 3, this is an indication that the vehicle manufacturer is low volume, and positions 12-14 will also be included in identifying vehicle manufacturer and type.

Under the old regulations these first three VIN positions were used to identify the vehicle manufacturer, type and make. This meant that when a vehicle manufacturer produced similar vehicle types, but under different brand nameplates, each one of these vehicle brands needed to use unique characters in these VIN sections. This requirement is the primary reason for the potential of repeating VINs. Under the new regulations a vehicle manufacturer will no longer have to identify specific vehicle brands/makes in this section, just the vehicle manufacturer and vehicle type. The specific vehicle brand/make is moved from the first section to the second section of the VIN by the new regulations.

Section Two: Positions 4-8

The purpose of VIN section two is to describe the attributes of the specific type of vehicle involved. The old regulation required VIN positions 4 & 5 to be alphabetic characters, position 6 & 7 had to be numeric, and position 8 could have been either alphabetic or numeric.

Under the new regulations the vehicle “make” is moved from the first section of the VIN to this section. Characters found in positions 4, 5, 6 and 8 can now be either alphabetic or numeric characters and position 7 is now solely alphabetic.

Section Three: Position 9

Under both set of VIN regulations, old and new, this position is the check digit for the VIN. This position’s sole purpose is to verify the accuracy of any VIN transcription. This check digit is mathematically computed from the VIN itself.

Section Four: Positions 10-17

This section is the same in both the old VIN format and the new format. The first character of this section (position 10) can either be numeric or alphabetic. The location is responsible for the vehicle model year. The second character (position 11) of this section represents the plant of manufacture. It can be either alphabetic or numeric. The five remaining characters (positions 12-17) are sequentially numeric characters, representing the production sequence of the vehicle. These last five characters are assigned by the manufacturer during the production process.

If you want to learn more on how vehicles VINs are generated, MDE has posted the current federal regulations on the [VEIP repair industry website](#).