

**MOTOR VEHICLE  
REGISTRATION  
EMBLEMS IN HAWAII**

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## **FOREWORD**

This report on motor vehicle registration emblems was prepared in response to House Concurrent Resolution No. 237 (1993). Special thanks are extended to the staffs of the police and finance departments of each county, and particularly to the following individuals for their assistance in preparing this report: Dennis Kamimura, Sergeant Robert Lung, Ed Shiinoki, and Gary Tanakaya.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Seventeenth Legislature, Regular Session of 1993, adopted House Concurrent Resolution No. 237 (attached as Appendix A) requesting a study on the feasibility and impact of placing motor vehicle registration emblems on the inside of a motor vehicle's rear window. The Legislature found that the motor vehicle registration emblem which is currently attached to the upper right portion of the rear license plate has been subject to theft because of its placement and requested a study on alternative placement.

This study has seven chapters including this one. Chapter 2 gives the reader a brief overview of the motor vehicle registration system in Hawaii. Chapter 3 discusses the problem of theft of motor vehicle registration emblems including available statistics from the various counties in Hawaii. Chapter 4 describes the results of a survey taken of the appropriate agencies which handle motor vehicle registrations in the fifty states and the territories and discusses the methods of motor vehicle registration enforcement used in other jurisdictions, and problems with the different systems and alternatives to license plate emblems. Chapter 5 discusses the positions of various national and local organizations, including the police and finance departments of each county in Hawaii. Chapter 6 goes over the advantages and disadvantages presented by the use of license plate emblems, windshield emblems, and other alternatives. Chapter 7 contains findings and recommendations.

## MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEMS IN HAWAII

Subsection (c) requires the owner to affix the tag or emblem to the top right portion of the rear license plate.

It is this tag or emblem (referred hereinafter as the "motor vehicle registration emblem" or "emblem") that is the subject of this study. Currently required by statute to be affixed to the top right portion of the rear license plate, complaints have surfaced regarding what the complainants consider to be the easy theft of these emblems. This study is focused upon the feasibility of moving this emblem to either the inside of the rear windshield or an alternative location.

### **Endnotes**

1. Revised Ordinances of Honolulu 1990, §41-17.1 (1990 Edition).
2. Revised Ordinances of Honolulu 1990, §41-18.1 (1990 Edition).
3. Revised Ordinances of Honolulu 1990, §6-20.2 (1990 Edition).
4. Hawaii Rev. Stat., §249-31.
5. Telephone interview with Dennis Kamimura, Administrator, Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division of the Department of Finance, City and County of Honolulu, October 6, 1993.

## Chapter 3

### ANALYSIS OF THE THEFT OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEMS IN HAWAII

The rationale asserted for moving the motor vehicle registration emblem from the license plate to the inside of the rear window is that theft of the emblem occurs when it is outside of the car on the license plate. The cost of replacing the emblem is borne by the vehicle owner. There is a loss of revenue to the State and the county for the vehicle that is operating with a stolen emblem as that means that the particular vehicle owner did not register the vehicle. Whether a move to the inside of the car is warranted depends largely on the number of thefts per year of the emblems. The ultimate policy issue for the Legislature to consider is whether the theft problem is significant enough (or other advantages otherwise exist) to warrant a change in the placement of the emblems.

This chapter presents the data currently available on the theft of motor vehicle emblems. Put simply, very little data were readily accessible. Until this year, only the police department for the county of Kauai kept records on the theft of motor vehicle emblems. No other county police or finance department kept records on theft of emblems. Emblem thefts were included with all other thefts, and the emblem theft cases could not be segregated by computer. One caveat to this analysis is the situation where the number of thefts is low but vehicle owners are experiencing multiple thefts per year which would become costly to that individual. However, it would be difficult to determine how often that occurs; therefore the simplest analysis would be to determine the percentage of overall thefts.

The following is a summary of the statistics available from each county.

#### City and County of Honolulu

According to the Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division of the Department of Finance, the division did not keep track of the amount of emblem thefts reported until 1993. However, with the impetus of the resolution authorizing this study, the division commenced tallying reported vehicle emblem thefts and reported the following:

#### NUMBER OF EMBLEM THEFTS (April 1993 to July 1993)

<u>Month</u>	<u>Number of Thefts</u>
April	496
May	339
June	291
July	311

The division continues to keep track of reported thefts, but the July count was the last published at the time of this writing,<sup>1</sup>

MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEMS IN HAWAII

The average number of emblem thefts for Honolulu for the four months from April through July, 1993 is 359.25. If the average number of thefts for the entire year was calculated by multiplying the monthly average of 359 by twelve months, it would result in a figure of 4,308 emblem thefts in a year.

The Department of Finance also keeps track of the number of vehicles registered in the State. The 1993 figures were not published at the time of this writing.

The total number of vehicles registered in Honolulu in 1992 was 624,390.<sup>2</sup> This includes passenger vehicles, trucks, motorcycles, and trailers. Although doing so would not be statistically accurate, if the percentage of motor vehicle registration emblem thefts were computed using the 1993 theft estimate for the year and the total number of vehicles registered in Honolulu for 1992, the emblem theft rate would be 0.69 percent. According to this figure, 69 emblem thefts would be reported for every 10,000 vehicles registered on the island of Oahu.

As mentioned earlier, this is a very rough estimate since the figures mix the 1992 vehicle count and the 1993 theft reports. They also do not account for variables such as errors in tallying the thefts or one car owner reporting multiple thefts in one year.

**Kauai County**

The Police Department of the county of Kauai was the only agency that was able and willing to supply statistics of motor vehicle emblem thefts reported over a period of years. The following shows the number of thefts for each year from 1979 to July, 1993.<sup>3</sup>

**REPORTED EMBLEM THEFTS  
(1979 - July 1993)**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Thefts</u>
1979	67
1980	86
1981	59
1982	49
1983	45
1984	36
1985	53
1986	41
1987	49
1988	42
1989	29
1990	36
1991	34
1992	53
1993	34

The average number of thefts per year on Kauai from 1979 to and including 1992 is 48.5. 1993 was not included as figures were only available up to July. The total number of vehicles registered in the county of Kauai for 1991 was 60,108 and for 1992 was 57,145. The average of these two numbers is 58,626.5. Thus the average number of vehicles (including passenger vehicles, trucks, motorcycles and trailers) for the two year period of 1991 and 1992 is 58,627. To get a very rough percentage of the number of motor vehicle registration emblem thefts compared to the total number of vehicles registered the average number of thefts from 1991 and 1992 was compared to the average number of vehicles registered for the two year period of 1991 and 1992. The average number of thefts from 1991 and 1992 is 46 which was calculated by adding the number of thefts for each year and dividing by two years. The emblem theft rate for 1991 and 1992 is 0.08 percent. According to this figure, eight emblem thefts would be reported for every 10,000 vehicles on the island of Kauai. Again, this is a very rough calculation as the possibility of error was not taken into account.

### **Maui and Hawaii Counties**

The departments of finance for the counties of Maui and Hawaii kept statistics on the number of emblems which were replaced.<sup>4</sup> However, since these figures would include lost or mutilated emblems, and not just thefts, they were not very helpful in determining the percentage of emblems stolen and so were not included in this study.

The police department of the county of Hawaii also does not have statistics on emblem thefts readily available.

The percentage of emblem thefts cannot be calculated for the county of Hawaii or the county of Maui as neither the police department nor the department of finance for those counties supplied the Bureau with statistics on such thefts.

In summary, rough estimates of emblem thefts in the City and County of Honolulu and Kauai are 0.69 percent (69 thefts reported per 10,000 registered vehicles) for Honolulu and 0.08 percent (8 thefts reported per 10,000 registered vehicles) for Kauai. Neither of these figures approaches 1 percent of the vehicles registered for that county. Accordingly, the perception of whether the emblem theft problem is significant may turn on whether one views a figure of 496 reported thefts in a month is "high", or whether a theft rate of less than 1 percent is "low."

### **Endnotes**

1. Interview with Dennis Kamimura, Administrator, Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division of the Department of Finance, City and County of Honolulu, August 13, 1993.
2. Ibid.
3. Correspondence from Calvin C. Fujita, Chief of Police, Police Department, County of Kauai, August 10, 1993.

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4. Correspondence from Henry Rosa, Manager, Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division of the Department of Finance, County of Maui, July 26, 1993. Correspondence from Harry A. Takahashi, Director of Finance, Department of Finance, County of Hawaii, August 12, 1993.

## **Chapter 4**

### **SURVEY OF THE UNITED STATES: METHODS OF ENFORCING VEHICLE REGISTRATION, PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

In order to determine what other possibilities for enforcing vehicle registration exist besides emblems on the license plate, a survey was sent to the other forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, and the territories. The survey asked for a description of the method used for enforcing vehicle registration, whether the state experienced problems such as theft, and if the motor vehicles agency had found any solutions. The survey is attached as Appendix B, and the list of the agencies is attached as Appendix C. This chapter includes a chart which briefly summarizes the findings of the survey. Responses for each state are tabulated in the chart under the following categories: type of motor vehicle registration emblem used, existence of a problem of theft, maker of the emblem, special features of the emblem, and miscellaneous concerns. For purposes of clarity in this study, the terms "motor vehicle emblem", "license plate emblem", "windshield emblem" or "emblem" are used, although in the statutes for and correspondence from the various states, these emblems are also referred to as "decals", "tags", and "stickers".

#### **Results of the Survey**

No response was received from two states, Georgia and Tennessee, and three out of the five territories, American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The following is a discussion of the responses received from the other forty-seven states, the District of Columbia and the two territories which responded, the Northern Marianas Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands. When the term "state" is generically used, it also refers to the District of Columbia and the territories. Unless otherwise footnoted, the facts discussed came from the survey.

The overwhelming majority of the states utilize emblems placed on a license plate as the method of enforcing vehicle registration. Forty-four of the forty-seven states, the District of Columbia, and the Northern Mariana Islands placed emblems on a license plate to enforce vehicle registration. There are variations to this theme used by different states:

- (1) Two emblems, one designating the month of expiration and one designating the year of expiration on one plate (or on each plate, front and rear) (eight states);
- (2) One emblem on the rear license plate (seven states including Hawaii); and
- (3) One emblem on each license plate (front and rear) (two states).

The other states that reported using license plate emblems did not specify where the emblem or emblems are located. Obviously the type of license plate emblem system used depends on whether one or two license plates are issued. None of the responses except Alaska's explained the rationale for using two emblems instead of one, or vice versa, or placing an emblem on each license plate or placing an emblem on only one plate. Alaska did report that it previously issued an emblem for the front and rear license plates, and changed to issuing one emblem for just the rear plate. The rationale was that this was a cost-saving measure. According to the administrator of the motor vehicle and licensing division for the city and county of Honolulu the extra cost of using two emblems is not worth it, which is the reason Hawaii uses only one emblem.<sup>1</sup> Virginia utilizes a license plate emblem and the local cities or counties utilize an additional emblem on the windshield as proof of their registration.

### **States Utilizing a Windshield Emblem**

**New Jersey.** Three states, New Jersey, New York, and Texas, and one territory, the U.S. Virgin Islands, utilize windshield emblems to enforce vehicle registration. New Jersey has used a windshield emblem since 1959. The emblem issued is actually an inspection emblem (it includes safety and emissions inspection) for which proof of registration must be presented. The decision to combine the registration and inspection emblem into one windshield emblem was largely driven by the redundant cost of administering two different programs by the same state agency; the secondary concern was theft of the emblems. As will be pointed out further in the discussion, requiring proof of other requirements such as liability insurance or safety or emissions inspection for a registration emblem makes that emblem more valuable and more susceptible to theft. New Jersey reported that with the windshield emblem, theft and counterfeiting is an ongoing problem, suspected to be to avoid the strict emissions standards rather than to avoid registration fees. A one month parking lot survey showed that 3.5 percent of the vehicles had expired emblems.

**New York.** New York also utilizes a windshield emblem to enforce vehicle registration. Each emblem is printed with information about the specific vehicle and would be difficult to use on another vehicle. The emblems are color coded to signify a particular year. A copy of a test sample of the windshield emblem is attached as Appendix D. It should be noted that two pieces of information contained on the emblem are the license plate number assigned to that particular vehicle and a general description of that vehicle (such as "1988 DODGE"). New York also has a bar code on the emblem which is supposed to help law enforcement agencies pull up information about the vehicle on the spot, but the Bureau was not able to confirm this with the department of motor vehicles for New York. New York reported that windshield emblems are rarely stolen, but that there are "inventory problems". "Inventory problems" means that the theft of the emblems occurs at a different point, not from the vehicle, but from the inventory. New York also reported that windshield emblems are sometimes counterfeited and sold. New York still utilizes license plate emblems for vehicles with no windshields, such as motorcycles, and reported that there have been very few reported thefts for these emblems.

New York suggested that a generic emblem and computer printing the expiration date and year in large print would simplify ordering and inventory and save money since the unused color coded emblems would not have to be destroyed at the end of each year. It has been pointed out, however, to the New York Department of Motor Vehicles that the law enforcement officers rely on the bright colors of the color coded, nongeneric emblems for easy detection and that counterfeiting might be easier if a switch is made to generic emblems.

**Texas.** Texas recently made the switch to front windshield emblems specifically due to the theft problem. They are currently phasing in this system. Texas reported 568,885 replacement emblems issued in 1992, (the state was still using the license plate emblem system at the time), and of these an estimated 60 percent were due to theft. Texas uses the registration system as a means to ensure fulfillment of the other laws such as the requirement of carrying liability insurance and the forthcoming emissions testing programs. Because of this the value of the emblem increases, encouraging more incidents of theft. Three counties noted a dramatic increase in theft of the license plate emblems when proof of insurance was required to register the vehicle.

In describing the change from license plate emblems to windshield emblems, Texas stated it moved the emblem to the windshield specifically to make it less accessible to thieves. Also, theft of the emblem then becomes a felony instead of a misdemeanor since the thief would have to break into the vehicle to steal it. Rear windows were not chosen because of extensive use of window tinting and louvres in Texas. License plate emblems will continue to be used on vehicles without windshields such as motorcycles. The registration emblem will be separate from the safety inspection emblem which is already on the front windshield. A copy of the Texas emblem is attached as Appendix E.

**U.S. Virgin Islands.** The U.S. Virgin Islands uses a windshield emblem to validate registration and it is placed on the bottom right hand corner of the front windshield. They reported that they have no problems with enforcement and have a minimum amount of theft of the emblems.

### **Discussion of Theft Problems**

Of the forty-six responses from states that utilize a license plate emblem system to enforce motor vehicle registration, thirty-five reported that theft is either not a problem or not significant enough to warrant a change in the system.

Chart 1  
SURVEY FINDINGS

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
ALABAMA	Emblem on license plate	No	3M materials	Designed to disintegrate upon removal; license plates reissued every 5 years	
ALASKA	Emblem on rear license plate	No	No response	Designed to disintegrate upon removal	In cold areas, frost or ice on windshield would make the emblem difficult to see
ARIZONA	2 emblems on 1 license plate: month (left corner) and year (right corner); year emblems reissued annually	Reported some problems however not great enough at this time to warrant a change	2 vendors: Decals, Inc. (Colorado); Weldon, Williams and Lick (Arkansas)		
ARKANSAS	Single plate issued; 2 decals: month (upper left corner); year (upper right corner)	No evidence of a significant theft problem	2 vendors: (lowest bidder) American Decal Co. of Chicago; Weldon Williams and Lick (Arkansas)		License plate remains with owner when car is transferred; therefore, emblem cannot remain with the car
CALIFORNIA	Emblem on rear license plate	Reported experiencing some theft and have discussed some alternatives but have not found a suitable alternative	No response		Law enforcement objects to windshield emblem due to poor emblem visibility, obstructing driver's vision, and difficulty with removal
COLORADO	Emblem on rear license plate	Reported problems of theft and have been investigating alternatives	3M -- materials; Colorado Correctional Industries -- production		Working with a Colorado company on an emblem that crumbles upon removal; process not implemented yet; intend to test emblem on state vehicles in near future
CONNECTICUT	One emblem on rear license plate	Did not report on theft however reported a problem on inventory control	Did not report maker, however reported stickers inserted manually by the Correctional Institution inmates and reported having an inventory control problem		In the next few years, will be renewing registration at the same time as emissions testing; have considered combining both stickers into one for the windshield

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
DELAWARE	Emblem on rear license plate	Reported problems with sticker and license plate theft, large enough to warrant investigation into alternatives	No response		Investigating possibility of developing a windshield emblem with an expiration date and license plate number; due to opposition by police, is considering using both windshield and plate emblems
FLORIDA	Emblem on upper right corner of the license plates	Reported some problems with theft in the larger counties attributed in large part to the requirement of emissions testing in the larger counties	3M and American Decal -- materials; Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises, Inc. -- manufacturer	Owners instructed to score emblem with an "X" upon application; license plate reissued every 5 years	License plate remains with the owner; upon transfer would need a new emblem, additionally, if both windshield and plate emblem issued, would have an inventory problem to issue replacements with the same number
GEORGIA	NO RESPONSE				
IDAHO	Emblem on license plate	No	3M -- materials; Correctional Industries -- production	Emblems tear upon removal	
ILLINOIS	Emblem on rear license plate	No significant problem of either theft or counterfeiting	American Decal of Chicago -- supplier	Instructs owners to remove old emblems and clean surface	
INDIANA	Emblem on license plate	No significant problem; notes that it is more common to have plate stolen		Emblem is perforated or scored so that it will tear if removed	License plate remains with owner
IOWA	Emblem on license plate	Some evidence of theft; appears to be a correlation between extended use of plates and reduction in number of vehicles registered	3M -- materials; Iowa State Industries -- manufacturer		Mentioned possibility of reissuing plates more often to encourage proper registration; suggested a 4-5 year time frame; will be testing a new emblem
KANSAS	Month and year emblem affixed to license plate	Not a significant problem	3M	Emblem is designed to tear upon removal	Law enforcement requested the emblem be enlarged; will do so with new issuance of plates in 1994

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
KENTUCKY	Emblem on lower right corner of license plate	No report of one			
LOUISIANA	Emblem on lower right corner of license plate	No report of one			
MAINE	2 emblems, 1 for month 1 for year on each plate (front and back)	No, but some instances of persons taking tin snips and snipping plate	3M -- materials	Emblems are slit so that they will tear when peeled off; security mark	
MARYLAND	Emblem on license plate	A few complaints, are looking into other types of material but generally satisfied	Maryland State Use Industry -- manufacturer		
MASSACHUSETTS	Emblem on upper right corner of license plate	Not a significant problem	3M		
MICHIGAN	Emblem on lower right corner of license plate	Not a significant problem	Michigan Department of Corrections -- manufacturer		Cost -- \$0.106 per emblem
MINNESOTA	2 emblems: 1 for year affixed to lower right corner and 1 for month affixed to lower left corner of plate	Experiencing some problems	3M -- materials; correctional facility -- manufacturer	Emblem disintegrates upon removal, however at temperatures above 80 degrees it becomes soft and is more easily removed; also, if you stack stickers, it can be removed	Had investigated a window emblem but found increase in size would be to costly. Also law enforcement is opposed to anything that isn't displayed on front and rear
MISSISSIPPI	2 emblems on license plate; 1 for year, 1 for month	Reported some problems of theft but not considering alternatives	3M -- materials; Decals, Inc (Colorado) -- manufacturer	Security symbol on emblem	
MISSOURI	Emblem on license plate	Not a significant problem; in the last 3 years, no increase in issuance of replacement plates/emblems	Missouri Correctional Institution -- manufacturer		The fact that the vehicle owner has to pay for replacement emblems is very unpopular and generates a lot of negative response

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
MONTANA	Emblem on top right corner of rear license plate	No	3M -- materials until last year; low bidder used own materials and destructibility is less than adequate	Background image to deter counterfeiting; destructibility if removed from plate	
NEBRASKA	Emblem on license plate	Not a significant problem	American Decal -- manufacturer	Emblem breaks upon removal	
NEVADA	Emblem on top right corner of rear license plate	Theft has been reported but magnitude of problem is unknown	American Decal -- manufacturer		Law enforcement opposes placement of emblem on windshield; license plate remains with owner
NEW HAMPSHIRE	Emblem on top right corner of license plate	No; also no problems with counterfeiting	3M -- materials	Emblem destruction upon removal	
NEW JERSEY	Windshield emblem for safety and emissions inspection and registration	Theft and counterfeiting is an ongoing problem; suspected to be to avoid strict emission standards rather than avoid registration fees	American Decal		1-month parking lot survey showed 3.5% with expired stickers
NEW MEXICO	Emblem on bottom right or left corner of rear license plate	No	3M	Tears upon removal	Have reports where the license plate is stolen
NEW YORK	Windshield emblem for vehicles with windshields; for vehicles with no windshields, emblem on license plate	Reported problems with inventory of windshield emblems; very few stolen reports of license plate emblems; windshield emblems rarely stolen		Each windshield emblem is printed with information about the specific vehicle and would be hard to use on another vehicle	Sometimes windshield emblems are counterfeited and sold
NORTH CAROLINA	Emblem on license plate	Isolated incidents of theft			
NORTH DAKOTA	Emblem on each license plate (front/back)	No	3M	Self-destructs	
OHIO	Emblem on lower right corner of rear license plate	No	3M		

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
OKLAHOMA	Emblem on license plate	Not a significant problem			
OREGON	Emblem on license plate	Reported problems of theft but have not found a violation	Decals, Inc. -- manufacturer	Designed to fall apart if removed	Emblem number is not part of the computer record; if information is needed to determine if emblem is assigned to a vehicle must do a manual search
PENNSYLVANIA	Emblem on license plate	Did not reply	3M -- materials; Correctional Industries -- manufacturer		Currently considering developing specifications for a more tamper-resistant emblem to deter theft
RHODE ISLAND	Emblem (month/year) on lower right corner of license plate	No	Rhode Island Prison Industry section of the Adult Correctional Department -- manufacturer		
SOUTH CAROLINA	Emblem on license plate	No	3M		
SOUTH DAKOTA	Emblem on license plate	No	3M -- materials		
TENNESSEE	NO RESPONSE				
TEXAS	Emblem on front windshield beginning December, 1993	Recently changed to windshield emblem because of theft problems		Adhesive front and scored back; self-destruct material; word "VOID" appears upon removal	Reported an increase in stolen emblems and plates when proof of insurance was required in 1991
UTAH	Emblem on rear license plate	Mentioned an ongoing problem			
VERMONT	2 emblems; 1 for each license plate (front/back)	Not a significant problem	3M -- materials	Reflective; destructible (has proved to be an adequate deterrent)	Currently evaluating options regarding emblem design: (a) a larger format; (b) a numeric date, i.e. 3/94; (c) separate month/year emblems for better readability

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
VIRGINIA	Month and year emblems affixed to the left and right portions of license plates. Additional county or city windshield registration emblem.	No	3M -- materials; State Department of Motor Vehicles -- manufacturer	License plate emblem designed to tear upon removal	
WASHINGTON	Emblems on front and rear license plates	Not a significant problem	Washington State Department of Corrections; Correctional Industries -- manufacturer		Serial number on emblem is recorded on vehicle's computer record -- valuable for reducing use of stolen and switched emblems; reviewing use of an emblem which would disintegrate if removed or a word-coded emblem
WEST VIRGINIA	Emblem on license plate	Not a significant problem although such incidents do occur		Self-destruct upon removal	Registration card kept in vehicle also has expiration date so can be matched with emblem to determine if the emblem is stolen
WISCONSIN	Emblems on license plate (month/year)	Rate of theft is low	3M materials; Badger State Industries (correctional enterprise) manufacturer	1/4" cuts perpendicular to the edge along the perimeter so that the emblem tears upon removal	Attributes low theft to the relatively low cost and high convenience of registering vehicles (cost is \$40); insurance not a prerequisite although emissions testing is in some counties
WYOMING	1 emblem on upper left corner of license plate	No			
WASHINGTON, D.C.	2 emblems on each license plate (front and back) month-left/year-right	Yes			Currently each vehicle has 4 different emblems; considering combining them into 1 windshield emblem; may cause a problem for enforcement as police would have to get out of their car to inspect emblem

STATE	TYPE OF MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEM	EXISTENCE OF PROBLEM OF THEFT	MAKER OF EMBLEMS	SPECIAL FEATURES OF EMBLEMS	MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS
AMERICAN SAMOA	NO RESPONSE				Section 22.1002(c) American Samoa Code Annotated requires 2 emblems to be affixed to license plates
GUAM	NO RESPONSE				Section 7120(b) Guam Code Annotated requires a validation device to be affixed to the license plate
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS	Emblem on license plate	Only 2 reported thefts in the past 5 years	3M materials; Saipan vendor	Emblems tear upon removal	Encountering problems identifying emblem (difficult to identify at 50 feet); considering a larger emblem
PUERTO RICO	NO RESPONSE				Section 482(b), Laws of Puerto Rico, Annotated requires a registration emblem to be affixed to the license plate
U.S. Virgin Islands	Windshield emblem; bottom right corner of front windshield	Not significant			

## **States Experiencing Theft Problems**

California reported experiencing some theft and has been investigating alternatives but has not found a suitable alternative. Colorado reported problems of theft and has been investigating alternatives. Delaware reported theft problems of the emblem as well as the license plate, large enough to warrant an investigation into alternatives. Florida reported some theft problems in the larger counties attributed in large part to the requirement of emissions testing in those counties. Iowa reported some evidence of theft and noted that there appears to be a correlation between extended use of the license plates and a reduction in the number of vehicles registered. Maryland reported a few complaints of theft and is investigating other types of material, but is generally satisfied with the present system. Minnesota reported experiencing some problems. Nevada reported that theft has been reported but that the magnitude of the problem is unknown. Oregon reported problems of theft but has not found a solution. Utah reported that theft is an ongoing problem. Washington D.C. also reported that theft is a problem and is currently considering combining all motor vehicle emblems (they currently issue four different emblems for each vehicle) into one windshield emblem. Connecticut did not report a theft problem but they did report a problem with inventory control. They also reported that in the next few years, they will be renewing registration at the same time as emissions testing, so they have considered combining both emblems into one for the windshield.

It should be noted that the two states which have been utilizing a windshield emblem for years, New Jersey and New York reported problems with counterfeiting and theft at the point of inventory (before it is distributed to the vehicle owners). Thus switching to a windshield emblem does not necessarily deter theft, it merely moves the theft to a different point in time. It would also rearrange the cost burden. Currently, when theft occurs from the vehicle, the owner of the vehicle bears the burden of paying the cost to replace the emblem. When theft occurs due to counterfeiting or from inventory, the county, state, or both, bear the burden of the cost of the emblem as well as any loss of revenue which would have been charged as a penalty to replace an emblem when it is stolen from a vehicle. In either case, theft from the vehicle or theft from the point of inventory or counterfeiting, revenue is lost from the vehicle illegally utilizing the stolen or counterfeited emblem. In Hawaii, the cost to replace an emblem is fifty cents unless it is replaced forty-five days prior to the renewal date; then the entire set of fees is charged.<sup>2</sup>

## **Special Features of the Emblems to Deter Theft from the Vehicle**

Many of the types of emblems currently utilized, particularly if manufactured using 3M Company materials, have special features in which the emblem is supposed to self-destruct if removed from the license plate or windshield. In Hawaii, the emblems are uniform across the State. The city and county of Honolulu purchases the emblems for all counties and its bid specifications require certain components which happen to be in the materials manufactured

by 3M Company. Currently, because they can comply with the bid specifications and because they are the lowest bidder, 3M Company supplies the materials for the Hawaii emblems and Decals, Incorporated manufactures the emblems.<sup>3</sup> The representative for 3M Company in Honolulu described the three special features of the emblem as follows:<sup>4</sup>

- (1) **Retro-reflective.** This means that when light shines on the emblem (such as a headlight of the car following behind) the light reflects directly back to the person looking at the emblem as opposed to being diffused. This is due to the layer of glass beads used to manufacture the material. This is an important feature for law enforcement officers as it makes the emblem much more visible from a distance and at night than if the emblem did not have the retro-reflective component.
- (2) **Self-destructive.** The emblem is supposed to self-destruct if properly applied, when an attempt is made to remove the emblem. Part of the problem with emblems being easily removed from the license plate is that they are not properly applied in the first place. To properly apply an emblem, the old emblems must be removed and the area of the license plate upon which the emblem will be applied must be cleaned. If this is done, the emblem will weather and is supposed to tear if removed. According to the director of the Division of Motor Vehicles for the city and county of Honolulu, when the emblem is given to the vehicle owner, these directions are printed on the packet, with the additional direction that an "X" should be scored upon the emblem after application in order to ensure that if the emblem is removed, it will come apart in pieces.<sup>5</sup> Both the representative of 3M Company and the director pointed out that if the emblems are stacked on top of each other, the top emblem can be sliced off in one piece. Also, if the license plate is heated, the emblem may be able to be peeled off.
- (3) **Watermark.** A transparent design on the emblem discourages counterfeiting. Only the manufacturing company can put the watermark on the emblem, so if an emblem does not have a watermark, it was not manufactured by the proper sources. Additionally, if the watermark appears to be irregular while the emblem is on a license plate, it is possible that the emblem had been removed or placed on the plate illegally.

The information from the other states utilizing license plate emblems was rather sketchy with regard to the actual emblems themselves. Twenty-two states reported using 3M Company materials and it can probably be safely assumed that these materials are the same or similar to the materials used for Hawaii's emblems. Decals, Inc. from Colorado (Hawaii's manufacturer) was cited as the manufacturer of the emblems for three other states. The other manufacturers cited were American Decal Company of Chicago, Weldon, Williams and Lick of Arkansas, or the particular state's prison industry. It should be noted that these figures

simply reflect those states that chose to reply to this question. Some states did not state how their emblems were manufactured. The Northern Marianas Islands uses a Saipan vendor.

Many states reported that their emblems were designed to destruct upon removal. Some mentioned that, like Hawaii, the vehicle owners are given instructions to remove old emblems, clean the surface, and score the emblems. Some states went further and put features in their emblems that would aid the self-destruction of the emblem upon removal. Indiana reported that its emblems are perforated when manufactured to facilitate destruction if they are removed after application. Maine and Wisconsin reported putting slits around the edge to facilitate destruction if removed after application. Again, if the emblems are stacked on each other, these attempts to make the emblems self-destructing could be futile as the emblem can be sliced off. Also, states and the 3M Company's Honolulu representative have reported that the emblem can be peeled off if the license plate is heated. It may be possible to peel off an emblem if it is scored or perforated by heating the plate and removing the emblem with a piece of clear plastic tape. As an aside, Montana reported that the low bidder for the previous year (1992) used its own materials and not the 3M Company's materials. It noted that the destructibility feature for this new emblem (not the 3M Company's emblem) is less than adequate.

As for the windshield emblems, Texas reported that its new windshield emblem is made of self-destructing material, has an adhesive front and a scored back, and that the word "VOID" appears on it upon removal.

### **Some Miscellaneous Concerns**

Alaska reported that it would probably not use windshield emblems as this type of emblem would be a problem in Alaska because the ice and frost on the windshield would make the emblem difficult to see.

In some states, unlike Hawaii, the license plates remain with the owner of the car to put on the owner's new vehicle, therefore the emblem cannot go with the vehicle which is what would happen if the emblem is on the windshield.

The Northern Marianas Islands said their main problem is that the emblem is difficult to see from a distance of fifty feet so it is investigating a larger emblem. Vermont is currently engaged in a study regarding license plate and emblem design. Vermont also reported a problem with readability of the month of expiration. It is considering a larger format or a numeric date such as "3/94".

## Alternative Solutions

Some states have been considering or have mentioned alternatives to both the current license plate emblem and the windshield emblem.

Colorado and Washington state are investigating a new type of emblem that is supposed to lose its color when peeled off so that all the thief would be left with is a piece of clear plastic. It is currently in the developmental stages and Colorado may have a product to test by the first of the year. The company that is producing this new material is TSL, Inc. of Aurora, Colorado. TSL can also produce this type of emblem in a windshield format.<sup>6</sup>

Pennsylvania reported that it is currently working with the state Department of General Services to develop specifications for a more tamper resistant license plate emblem to deter theft.

Iowa mentioned that it will be testing a new secure emblem in the next year with the 3M company that has an image on it. Iowa also noted that there appears to be a relationship between extended use of the same license plates with emblems and the reduction in the number of vehicle registrations actually renewed. Apparently as the length of time increases between the license plate renewal, the number of registrations decreases. Iowa reported that the remedy would be to reissue license plates more often and that it appears that something in the time frame of four to five years may be more appropriate.

Maryland also mentioned that the problem is not with the emblem itself but with the duration of time between issuing new plates. As time goes on between issuance of new plates, the emblems pile up and it becomes very easy to remove the top emblem without destroying it.

Several states mentioned the use of vehicle specific numbers on the emblem to reduce misuse of emblems. Vermont reported that its emblems have a serial number on them for inventory control purposes only. It reported that misuse of the emblems could be reduced by making these numbers license plate specific. The constraint to this is the staff needed to make the appropriate entries in the computer database and the existing database record configuration. The director of the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles foresees the possibility of this in the future as improved data management comes on line. Washington State reported that the serial number of the emblem is recorded on the vehicle's computer record and that it is valuable for reducing the use of stolen and switched emblems. The emblems used in Hawaii have serial numbers on them and can only be traced manually so is not very effective in deterring misuse of the emblems.

## Summary of Survey

It can be seen from the survey of the rest of the country that the predominant method of enforcing motor vehicle registration is placement of one or two emblems on either one or both (when applicable) license plates, as Hawaii does. Three states and one territory utilize windshield emblems: New Jersey, New York, Texas and the U.S. Virgin Islands. New Jersey and New York have used windshield emblems for some time; Texas recently made the switch from license plate emblems to windshield emblems and is still phasing this system in.

Ten states using license plate emblems reported experiencing some problems with theft of either the emblem or the entire license plate. Theft of the emblems was the reason cited by Texas for switching to windshield emblems. Five of these states mentioned working on alternative emblems to deter theft. Colorado and Washington State are working with a Colorado company, TSL, Inc., on new materials to ensure destruction of the emblem when removed. These alternatives are still in the developmental stages so information provided on them was somewhat sketchy. New Jersey and New York, two states using windshield emblems for some time, reported problems with inventory control and counterfeiting.

Generated from the survey of the other states, the following is a list of alternatives to the current 3M company license plate emblems used in Hawaii:

- (1) Windshield emblems;
- (2) License plate emblems using other types of materials such as one in which the color peels off when the emblem is removed;
- (3) Putting additional security features on the emblems such as perforation or slits around the perimeter of the emblem;
- (4) Reissuing license plates more frequently, somewhere in the 4 to 5 year time frame; and
- (5) Either using the serial numbers printed on the license plate emblems or putting information on the emblem that is vehicle specific and recording this information on the computer database for easy checking. If additional information (such as the license plate number or vehicle identification number) is put on the emblem a larger emblem may be necessary.

## Endnotes

1. Telephone interview with Dennis Kamimura, Administrator, Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division of the Department of Finance, City and County of Honolulu, December 17, 1993.
2. Ibid.

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3. Interview with Ed Shiinoki, Honolulu Representative, 3M Company, August 24, 1993.
4. Interview with Dennis Kamimura, August 13, 1993.
5. ibid.
6. Interview with Mark Bar, President, TSL, Inc., November 29, 1993. He can be contacted at 2260 S. Xanadu Way, Suite 240, Aurora, CO 80014, phone: (303) 671-8800.

## **Chapter 5**

### **POSITIONS OF INTERESTED ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEMS**

This chapter discusses the positions of various organizations contacted in Hawaii and the United States on what type of emblem or enforcement mechanism should be used for registration of motor vehicles. The organizations contacted were the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). Among agencies in Hawaii, the positions of the state Department of Transportation and the county departments of finance are discussed, as well as those of the police departments for the City and County of Honolulu and the counties of Hawaii and Kauai. The Police Department of Maui did not respond. A list of organizations contacted with addresses, is attached as Appendix F.

#### **American Association of Motor Vehicles Administrators**

The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) is an organization comprised of officials representing sixty-seven states, provinces, and territories who administer motor vehicle laws and regulations. The organization promotes reasonable and uniform laws and regulations governing registration, certification of ownership, equipment and operation of motor vehicles, and issuance of motor vehicle driver's licenses. The AAMVA issued the following as its official position on motor vehicle registration emblems:

The date of registration expiration shall be displayed on the vehicle by means of a validating sticker, preferably on the rear license plate in accordance with the discretion of the department.

What is meant by this is that although the AAMVA advocates use of a rear license plate emblem, discretion is left to the appropriate department to utilize what is best, such as a windshield emblem if necessary, in acknowledgement of such problems as theft.<sup>1</sup>

#### **International Association of Chiefs of Police**

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is composed of police executives who are commissioners, superintendents, chiefs, and directors of national, state, provincial, and municipal departments; assistant and deputy chiefs; division or district heads. Among other things, the IACP provides consultation and research services in all phases of police activity.

The IACP takes the position that registration validation emblems should be displayed uniformly on vehicles in every state. Lack of uniformity creates problems for law enforcement

officers attempting to recognize and identify specific motor vehicles. The IACP also strongly recommends that two fully reflective license plates be issued with the validation emblems placed on both the front and the rear license plate, and opposes placing the registration emblem on the rear window of motor vehicles but did not provide an explanation.

The IACP also adopted a position recommending reissuance of license plates on a regular basis every three to five years as the best method to reduce theft and loss of revenue from registration avoidance and to maximize law enforcement safety and productivity. The IACP noted that theft of registration emblems varies by state. The problem appears to be most severe in states where there has not been a regular reissuance of license plates for many years. The IACP cited correspondence from the Department of Revenue for the State of Georgia. Georgia officials conducted an in-depth computer analysis and survey of vehicle registration avoidance in the state. They concluded that as the state progressed into a tag (license plate) cycle, taxpayers increasingly do not purchase revalidation emblems to renew the license plate; and that nonregistration is costly to the state through loss of large sums of tax revenue. As a result of this study, Georgia reduced the license plate reissue cycle from seven to five years.

The IACP strongly opposes the practice of placing emblems on the front windshield as it places the law enforcement officer in an extremely vulnerable position. Placement in the rear window would be a slight improvement, however it would still put the officer at a disadvantage. No explanation was provided as to why it would place an officer at a disadvantage.

The IACP noted that if a rear window validation emblem is chosen, it should be fully reflectorized with month and year readable from 100 feet as currently required for license plate emblems.

The IACP also mentioned two solutions to the problem of theft of license plate emblems:

- (1) Utilization of self-destructing emblems; and
- (2) Printing the license plate number on the emblem.<sup>2</sup>

## **Departments of Finance**

### **City and County of Honolulu**

The official position of the Department of Finance for the City and County of Honolulu is that it opposes moving the emblem to the inside of the vehicle. The Department feels that although theft of the emblems does occur, there is no demonstrated need for a change in the system.

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For enforcement and public convenience, it is easier to have the emblem on the rear license plate. If the emblem is placed on the front windshield, law enforcement officers can only look at a stopped vehicle, and would have to get out of their own vehicle in order to inspect the emblem. It is a nuisance to have to scrape the emblem off the windshield.

If the emblem is placed on the rear windshield, there would be a problem with convertibles and vans with no rear windshields. A dual system would have to be created where vehicles without windshields such as convertibles, motorcycles, and some vans would utilize license plate emblems while others would use windshield emblems. Uniformity makes for easier detection. Additionally, for some vehicles, it will be difficult to get to the rear window to apply and remove the emblem.

For some vehicles whose rear windows are sloped, such as a hatchback, it is difficult to see the emblem unless you walk up to it. Tinted windows as well as some rear window defrosters can be scraped off at the time the emblem is removed. Multi-purpose vehicles and some vans can have a darker tint, making an emblem difficult to see.

Moving the emblem to the inside of the vehicle does not necessarily deter theft. Emblems can be removed by heating the glass. Additionally, if emblem theft is the primary motivation, since the thief would have to get into the car, he or she may be tempted to steal other things or totally strip the vehicle.<sup>3</sup>

### **County of Kauai**

The Department of Finance for the County of Kauai is opposed to moving the emblem to the inside of the vehicle. The department advocates having the emblem remain on the rear license plate. The rationale is that if the emblem is moved to the inside of the vehicle, a thief would have to break into the vehicle to get the emblem and it would cost more to repair the vehicle than to replace an emblem removed from the license plate.<sup>4</sup>

### **County of Maui**

The Department of Finance for the County of Maui is concerned about the number of thefts of emblems as well as license plates and is supportive of this inquiry. The department was not able to supply statistics on the actual number of thefts but reported that in 1991, the total plate and emblem replacements<sup>5</sup> were 1025 and in 1992, the total plate and emblem replacements were 1,999. This is an increase of 95 percent in one year, although it cannot be determined what the statistics are for theft alone. However, it has caused the department of finance to become concerned, although it cannot be determined how many of those replacements were caused by theft alone. While the theft problem has caused the department to become concerned, the Department does not definitively advocate a change.<sup>6</sup>

### **County of Hawaii**

The Department of Finance for the County of Hawaii believes that the placement of the emblem should remain on the top right hand portion of the rear license plate. The Department feels that the theft problem is insignificant and the current placement provides the highest visibility for law enforcement purposes. Additionally, the Department noted that the current placement is consistent with forty-seven other states.<sup>7</sup>

### **Police Departments**

For the police departments, registration of motor vehicles aids the police in monitoring vehicles on the road and to see that they are abiding by the laws on taxation of vehicles. The following are the positions of the various county police departments, except for the County of Maui, which did not respond.

### **City and County of Honolulu**

The Police Department for the City and County of Honolulu now favors the placement of motor vehicle registration emblems on the inside of the front windshield on the driver's side. Until recently, the department favored the placement of the emblems on the license plate. This change in position is motivated by concern over thefts. The Department also:

- (1) Expressed concerns about the theft of the safety stickers and is considering the feasibility of combining the two emblems into one;
- (2) Recommends that the windshield emblem be enlarged to make them readily visible to police officers; and
- (3) Expressed concern about the type of material and adhesive to be used for the windshield emblem because the emblem will have to be removed each year.<sup>8</sup>

Presently, the City and County of Honolulu, by ordinance, limits the placement of emblems on windshields to the front windshield in the bottom, right-hand corner, and only upon approval of the Chief of Police.<sup>9</sup> However, passing a state statute requiring the emblem to be placed anywhere on a windshield (front or rear) would preempt the Honolulu ordinance.

### **County of Kauai**

Although the emblem theft rate in the County of Kauai is relatively small, less than one-tenth of one percent, the Police Department is committed to investigating the theft problem and would not be against a change in order to reduce the number of thefts. The Department did voice some concerns in choosing an alternative placement of the emblems, recommending that a location be selected that:

- (1) Will provide ease in detecting whether the registration is current; and
- (2) Takes into consideration vehicles such as convertibles where there is no rear windshield or vehicles that would have the tendency to have a rear window obstructed by loads.<sup>10</sup>

### **County of Hawaii**

The Police Department of the County of Hawaii is opposed to placing the registration emblem on the rear windshield for the following reasons:<sup>11</sup>

- (1) Because modern vehicles are more aerodynamically designed, the rear windows are often built at an angle. This angle would make an emblem placed on the rear window difficult to see, creating an enforcement problem;
- (2) Emblems placed on the rear window would have to be transparent for better driver visibility but that would make them more difficult to see, also creating an enforcement problem;
- (3) Many of the newer vehicles have rear window brake lights; placing anything else on the rear windows, even something the size of an emblem, would interfere with driver visibility;
- (4) Many vehicles have "after market" window tints on the rear window. Placing an emblem on the rear window would cause a problem of damaging the tinting when the emblem is scraped off;
- (5) Similarly, many vehicles have rear window defrosters that may be damaged when the emblem is scraped off;
- (6) Newer vehicles have a painted or ceramic coated molding on the interior of the rear window, making adhesion of the emblems difficult; and
- (7) Placing the emblems on the inside of the rear window would not prevent the problem of theft if the vehicle is unlocked.

**Department of Transportation, State of Hawaii**

The Department of Transportation believes that the emblems should remain on the rear license plates for the following reasons:<sup>12</sup>

- (1) The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators' policy positions and bylaws recommend that the emblem be on the rear license plates;
- (2) Emblem theft statistics are currently not available. Judging from the calls received by the Department regarding the theft of the emblems, it does not seem to be a major problem. The present system is the most workable system with the present technology; and
- (3) Moving the emblem to the inside of the rear window will create problems such as:
  - (A) Blockage of vision;
  - (B) Removing and replacing the expired emblem;
  - (C) Location of the emblem on the rear window;
  - (D) The size and quality requirements for the emblem;
  - (E) Detection of expired emblems; and
  - (F) Vehicles with no rear window, and convertibles.

The alternative of placing the emblem on the rear bumper next to the safety sticker does not deter theft. Additionally, present bumper design, materials used in construction, and painted surfaces create problems with adhesion of emblems. Scratching and peeling of painted surfaces are other problems that occur when replacing emblems on the bumper. The Department has no objection to placing the emblem on the bumper if solutions to the problems stated can be found.<sup>13</sup>

**Summary**

Generally speaking, the controversy over the placement of the motor vehicle registration emblem concerns the conflict of easy detection of expired registration, and the safety of the law enforcement officers on the one hand versus theft of the emblems on the other. The positions taken by the various national, state, and county organizations and

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agencies depict this conflict. Nationally, law enforcement officers usually favor leaving placement of the emblem on the license plate due to easy detection and safety of the officers. Placement on the front windshield would require the officer to stop the car and go around to the front of the car, causing detection of expired emblems to become a more difficult process as well as compromising the safety of the officer. Placement on the rear windshield still reduces the ease with which an expired registration can be detected and also causes problems with removal of the emblem, driver visibility, and uniformity as some vehicles do not have rear windshields and would still require a license plate emblem. The International Association of Chiefs of Police, the departments of finance for the City and County of Honolulu, the County of Kauai, and the County of Hawaii; the Police Department for the County of Hawaii; and the state Department of Transportation support retention of the emblems on license plates.

The opposing view of placing the emblem inside the vehicle stems from concerns over the ease with which an emblem can be stolen when it is outside the vehicle on the rear license plate. The Police Department of the City and County of Honolulu favors placement of the emblem on the front windshield. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators favors retaining the license plate emblem, but acknowledges that another placement may be necessary when problems such as theft become too significant.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police also suggests reducing the time between reissuing license plates to a four to five year cycle and putting license plate numbers on the emblems as alternative means of deterring theft and nonregistration of the vehicles. The City and County of Honolulu is currently in the final stages of replacing the old warrior license plates with the new rainbow plates. The other counties have already done so. The time frame for the license plate cycle is ten years. Another alternative is to place the emblem on the bumper where the safety sticker is. The state Department of Transportation pointed out the problems of removal of the emblem from the bumper, and the Honolulu Police Department is considering the possibility of combining the safety sticker and registration emblem into one emblem placed on the front windshield.

### **Endnotes**

1. Correspondence from John H. Strandquist, CAE, Executive Director, American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, August 18, 1993. Telephone interview with Larry Greenberg, American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, September 17, 1993.
2. Correspondence from Daniel N. Rosenblatt, Executive Director, International Association of Chiefs of Police, September 21, 1993.
3. Interview with Dennis Kamimura, Administrator, Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division of the Department of Finance, City and County of Honolulu, August 13, 1993.
4. Faxed correspondence from Verna Yamase, Motor Vehicle Registration Officer, Motor Vehicle Registration, Department of Finance, County of Kauai, November 9, 1993.

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5. It should be noted that plate and emblem replacement statistics also include lost or mutilated plates and emblems as well as those that are stolen.
6. Correspondence from Henry Rosa, Manager, Division of Motor Vehicle and Licensing Division, Department of Finance, County of Maui, July 26, 1993.
7. Correspondence from Harry Takahashi, Director of Finance, Department of Finance, County of Hawaii, August 12, 1993.
8. Correspondence from Michael Nakamura, Chief of Police, Police Department, City and County of Honolulu, October 15, 1993. Telephone interview with Sargeant Robert Lung, Police Department, City and County of Honolulu, November 8, 1993.
9. Traffic Code of the City and County of Honolulu, 15-1930 (1990).
10. Correspondence from Calvin Fujita, Chief of Police, Police Department, County of Kauai, August 10, 1993.
11. Correspondence from Victor Vierra, Chief of Police, Police Department, County of Hawaii, October 4, 1993.
12. Correspondence from Rex Johnson, Director of Transportation, Department of Transportation, State of Hawaii, October 18, 1993.
13. ibid.

## **Chapter 6**

### **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF LICENSE PLATE EMBLEMS, WINDSHIELD EMBLEMS AND OTHER ALTERNATIVES**

This chapter summarizes the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the current system utilizing license plate emblems, placement of the emblems on the inside front or rear windshield, and other possible alternatives. These advantages and disadvantages, and the various alternatives were derived from the correspondence received in the surveys of motor vehicle agencies in other states and Hawaii.

#### **License Plate Emblems**

##### **Advantages**

- (1) Easy detection due to uniformity among all vehicles and the reflective quality of the emblem. Law enforcement officers can detect an expired emblem from behind and do not have to stop the vehicle or get out of their own vehicle. It should be noted that in 1992, the Honolulu Police Department issued 15,365 citations for untaxed vehicles.<sup>1</sup> This is an indication of the effectiveness of the license plate emblems.
- (2) Easy removal and application of the emblem.
- (3) If the emblem is stolen, the thief does not have to break into the vehicle and, in so doing, cause damage to it, or be tempted to steal items in the vehicle.

##### **Disadvantages**

- (1) Emblems can be stolen easily if they are stacked on each other (contrary to instructions) or if the emblem is not scored.
- (2) Even if the emblem has a perforation or is scored, it can be lifted off using clear plastic tape and heating the license plate.

## Windshield Emblems

### Advantages

- (1) Will discourage some potential thieves as stealing a windshield emblem placed in the car (likely) becomes a felony since the thief would have to break into the car. Currently, theft of the license plate emblem (on the outside of the vehicle) is a misdemeanor.

### Disadvantages (Both Types of Windshield Emblems--Front or Rear)

- (1) Theft of emblems switches to theft from inventory and counterfeiting becomes a problem.
- (2) The emblems are a nuisance to remove.
- (3) Emblems can still be removed by heating the glass.
- (4) The thief has to break into the vehicle to steal the emblem, causing more damage. Also, once in the vehicle, the thief may be tempted to strip the vehicle or steal items in the vehicle.
- (5) Cracked or damaged windshields which have to be replaced can exceed the cost of another emblem.
- (6) Removal and resale of emblems from abandoned or demolished vehicles would add to the counterfeit problem.

## Front Windshield Emblems

### Disadvantages

- (1) Detection of expired emblems places the law enforcement officer in an extremely vulnerable position as the officer has to go to the front of a stopped vehicle to check the emblem.
- (2) Detection of expired emblems becomes more difficult (and therefore less likely to occur) as the officer can only detect them when the vehicle is stopped or parked.

## Rear Windshield Emblems

### Disadvantages

- (1) A dual system would have to be created for (1) vehicles with rear windshields, and (2) those without rear windshields such as convertibles, motorcycles and some vans. Detection of expired emblems then becomes more difficult and less likely to occur as uniformity makes for easier detection.
- (2) Tinting and rear window defrosters might be scraped and therefore damaged when the emblem is removed.
- (3) Tinting of windows, especially in multi-purpose vehicles and some vans that have a darker tint, makes the emblem more difficult to see.
- (4) Vehicles with very sloped windows such as hatchbacks, make the emblems difficult to see.
- (5) The emblems may have to be transparent for better driver visibility, but that would make the emblem more difficult to see.
- (6) Many newer vehicles have rear window brake lights. Placing anything else on the windows would interfere with driver visibility.
- (7) Newer vehicles have a painted or ceramic coated molding on the interior of the rear window, making adhesion of the emblems difficult.

### Alternatives

The following is a discussion of the alternatives to the license plate emblems and the windshield emblems.

**New Materials.** Several states have mentioned investigation into new materials that would make a license plate emblem more secure. TSL, Inc. of Aurora, Colorado is developing a new emblem that loses its color when peeled off, leaving the thief with a piece of clear plastic. It is still in the developmental stage, and Colorado will be testing it on state vehicles soon.

**More Frequent Reissuance of License Plates.** The International Association of Chiefs of Police advocates reissuing license plates somewhere around every four to five years. The IACP and some states have noted that the problem of nonrenewal of registration appears to

be most severe in the states where there has not been a regular reissuance of license plates for many years.

**Disadvantages<sup>2</sup>**

- (1) Reissuing license plates requires an outlay by the counties of large sums of money to manufacture the plates. Although the money would eventually be recouped from the purchasers of the plates, and even revenues gained, the initial outlay is large. For the City and County of Honolulu this would be in the millions of dollars. It is not easy to come up with such a huge sum of money every four to five years, and the city would be losing interest on that money.
- (2) Additional cost of storing the license plates.
- (3) Additional cost of programming the change into the computers.
- (4) Cost to the public to purchase the new plates.

**Printing Vehicle Specific Information Such as the License Plate Number on the Emblem**

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and other states have suggested printing vehicle specific information such as the license plate number on the emblem and computerizing this information so that it is easily traced.

**Disadvantages**

- (1) Thieves might then be tempted to steal the whole license plate (if the license plate number is used).
- (2) A larger emblem may be needed, raising the cost of emblems.
- (3) The Department of Finance for each county would have to make the emblems themselves. Twenty-four computers would be needed for statewide implementation which would cost approximately \$351,000, not including the cost for maintenance.<sup>3</sup>

### **Perforation of the License Plate Emblem by the Manufacturer**

Some states mentioned that the emblem is perforated by the manufacturer to facilitate destruction if the emblem is removed.

#### **Disadvantages<sup>4</sup>**

- (1) The emblem can still be cut off if the emblems are stacked.
- (2) The emblem may still be removed by heating the plate and lifting the emblem off with a piece of clean plastic tape.
- (3) Perforation makes the emblem more difficult to read.

### **Placing the Emblem on the Bumper Next to the Safety Sticker**

Another alternative is placing the emblem on the bumper next to the safety sticker.

#### **Disadvantages**

- (1) Safety stickers are also subject to theft, so this may not necessarily deter theft.
- (2) Materials used to make vehicle bumpers may peel or be scratched when the emblem is removed.
- (3) Rubber bumpers get cut when the emblem is removed. Many people buy special bumper attachments to put the safety sticker on.
- (4) Emblems that are piled up can be removed by slicing the top emblem off.

It should be noted that in any system, risk of theft or counterfeiting gets larger when there are other requirements such as safety or emissions inspection or proof of insurance. Currently, proof of a current safety inspection is required for vehicle registration renewals. Since proof of liability insurance is required for a safety inspection, this means that liability insurance is indirectly required for registration renewal. These requirements make a registration emblem more valuable and increase the risk of theft.

**Endnotes**

1. Testimony of Major Boisse Correa, Traffic Division of the Honolulu Police Department, City and County of Honolulu, on House Bill No. 224, House Committee on Transportation, February 10, 1993, Regular Session of 1993.
2. Interview with Dennis Kamimura, Administrator, Motor Vehicle Licensing Division, Department of Finance, City and County of Honolulu, August 13, 1993.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

## **Chapter 7**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Findings**

1. Hawaii currently utilizes an emblem placed on the upper right corner of the rear license plate to enforce motor vehicle registration. At the time the registration of the vehicle is renewed each year, a new emblem is given to the owner of the vehicle, color-coded for the year and with an abbreviation of the month.

2. The emblem is proof that the owner of the vehicle has registered the vehicle with the appropriate county, and indirectly shows that the owner has paid the taxes and fees collected by the State and counties, as well as had the vehicle inspected for safety and has purchased liability insurance.

3. Questions have surfaced regarding the easy theft of the emblems from motor vehicles.

4. Theft of the emblems results in the owner of the vehicle being forced to purchase a new emblem, as well as results in loss of revenue in terms of the fees and taxes collected by the State and counties at the time of registration from the vehicle that is using the stolen emblem.

5. The counties of Hawaii and Maui have not maintained statistics on the rate of theft of the motor vehicle registration emblems. The County of Kauai reported that the theft rate of the emblems is approximately 0.08 percent (8 thefts for every 10,000 registered vehicles) vehicles. The City and County of Honolulu reported a theft rate of approximately 0.69 percent (69 thefts for every 10,000 registered vehicles) for the period of April to July, 1993, the only period for which statistics were kept.

6. The average number of emblem thefts for one month for the period of April, 1993 to July, 1993 in the city and county of Honolulu, is approximately 359.

7. Most states in the United States utilize some type of emblem system placed on one or both (if applicable) license plates.

8. Three states, New Jersey, New York and Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands utilize a windshield emblem to enforce registration.

9. Texas reported switching to windshield emblems from license plate emblems specifically because of a theft problem. It is currently phasing in this system.

## MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEMS IN HAWAII

10. New York and New Jersey reported that with windshield emblems, theft of the emblems still occurs, but occurs at the point of inventory and through counterfeiting.

11. Other alternatives exist, such as changing the license plates every four to five years instead of the current ten years and placing vehicle specific numbers on the emblems. Washington state and Colorado are working with a private company to develop a new emblem whose color peels off at the time of removal, thereby leaving a thief with just a clear piece of plastic. These alternatives are not without problems, of their own.

### **Recommendations**

1. Moving the motor vehicle registration emblems from the rear license plate to either the windshield or rear window is not necessary at this time unless the Legislature deems the theft rate--presently less than one percent--is high enough to constitute a need for a change as well as overcome the disadvantages of the alternate locations.

2. If the Legislature directs a change in the location of the registration emblems, the alternative most likely to be effective for law enforcement purposes (although disadvantages still exist) would be a decal on the rear window.

3. Because the theft problem may increase in the future as the "value" represented by the emblem (i.e., payment of registration fees, vehicle weight taxes, motor vehicle insurance and safety checks) increases, the Department of Transportation should be directed to:

a. Work with the respective county agencies in order to compile and maintain statistics on motor vehicle emblem thefts on a statewide basis;

b. Monitor subsequent developments in this field in other states concerning policies, practices, and devices used to demonstrate compliance with registration requirements while reducing the ease of theft; and

c. Report on these areas to the Legislature and the counties either periodically or on an "as needed" basis.

Appendix A

H.C.R. NO. 237

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SEVENTEENTH LEGISLATURE, 1993  
STATE OF HAWAII

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HOUSE CONCURRENT  
RESOLUTION

REQUESTING A STUDY ON THE FEASIBILITY AND IMPACT OF PLACING MOTOR  
VEHICLE REGISTRATION EMBLEMS ON THE INSIDE OF A MOTOR  
VEHICLE'S REAR WINDOW.

WHEREAS, Section 249-7(c), Hawaii Revised Statutes, requires  
that a motor vehicle registration emblem (emblem) be placed on  
the top right hand portion of the rear license plate of the motor  
vehicle; and

WHEREAS, often, the emblem has been subject to theft because  
of its placement; and

WHEREAS, stolen emblems are often found on motor vehicles  
with expired tags or on motor vehicles not registered with the  
county; and

WHEREAS, although the Motor Vehicles Division of the City  
and County of Honolulu's Department of Finance recognizes that  
there is a problem with stolen or mutilated emblems it has not  
recorded the number of emblems that were requested for  
replacement; and

WHEREAS, the cost of replacing the emblem is assumed by the  
owner of the motor vehicle and the taxpayers; and

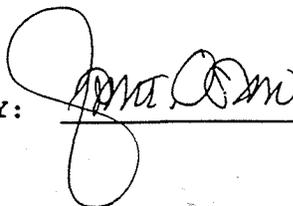
WHEREAS, other states have already enacted legislation  
requiring that the emblem be placed, instead, on the inside of a  
motor vehicle's rear window; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the  
Seventeenth Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session  
of 1993, the Senate concurring, that the Legislative Reference  
Bureau conduct a study on the feasibility and impact of placing  
emblems on the inside of a motor vehicle's rear window; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Reference Bureau  
submit a report with its findings and recommended legislation to  
the Legislature twenty days before the convening of the 1994  
Regular Session; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a certified copy of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Legislative Reference Bureau, the State Director of Transportation, and the Director of Finance of each county.

OFFERED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. M. ...", written over a horizontal line.

## Appendix B

Samuel B. K. Chang  
Director

Research (808) 587-0666  
Revisor (808) 587-0670  
Fax (808) 587-0681



LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU  
State of Hawaii  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

July 23, 1993

5118A

The Legislative Reference Bureau of the State of Hawaii is part of the state legislature and conducts, among other things, studies on topics requested by the legislature.

Pursuant to House Concurrent Resolution No. 237 (1993), the state legislature has directed our office to conduct a study on the feasibility and impact of placing motor vehicle registration emblems on the inside of each motor vehicle's rear window. Our current system places a color-coded emblem with the month of expiration on the top right-hand corner of the license plate. The legislature is concerned about the theft of the emblems and the problem of stolen emblems being found on vehicles whose tags have expired or are not registered in the appropriate county.

Our office is aware that several other states have looked into similar problems and have come up with solutions such as an eggshell emblem which crumbles if it is removed and an emblem upon which the word "void" appears if removed. As part of our study, we are surveying the forty-nine other states, the District of Columbia, and the territories to ascertain their method of enforcing vehicle registration laws.

Accordingly, we appreciate your assistance in furnishing the following information:

- (1) Whether your state has a uniform method of enforcing motor vehicle registration or whether it is done by individual counties or other groups;
  - (a) If it is uniform, please describe it and indicate any legislation enacted pursuant to this including statutory cites and/or rules;
  - (b) If it is not uniform, please describe how it is enforced (i.e., by individual counties, by groups of counties, etc.) and any information you may have on how it is enforced by these groups, including persons our office may contact for information, and statutory cites and/or rules authorizing these groups to enforce registration;
- (2) If your state has had problems with enforcement, please describe these problems, any solutions and any pros and cons to these solutions which have been discussed;

July 23, 1993

- (3) Specifically, if your state uses some type of emblem or sticker method of enforcing motor vehicle registration and there have been problems such as theft of the stickers, please describe these problems, any solutions, and any pros and cons to these solutions which may have been discussed;
- (4) If your state uses some type of emblem or sticker method of enforcing motor vehicle registration or any of the solutions to problems with enforcement involve use of a sticker or emblem, please furnish our office with any information you may have regarding cost of these stickers or any cost/benefit analysis you may have done, and any contact organization including a specific contact person who may be able to furnish more information on cost (for example, the 3M Company which furnishes materials for the Hawaii registration stickers); and
- (5) Any other relevant information.

A response by August 17, 1993 would be helpful. If you have any questions, you may contact Gaye Miyasaki or Ken Takayama at (808) 587-0666. Thank you very much for your effort. If you would like a copy of our study when it is completed in December, please let us know.

Sincerely,

  
Samuel B. K. Chang  
Director

SBKC:mm  
Enc.

## Appendix C

Mr. Bob McCain, Director  
Motor Vehicle Division  
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Mr. Jay Dulany, Director  
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Mr. Rex Hubbard, Director  
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Mr. Tim Leathers  
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Vehicle Regulation Department  
Transportation Cabinet  
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Ms. Marlene Swanson, Director  
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Transportation Systems Administration  
Department of Public Works  
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Office of Motor Vehicles  
Department of Public Safety  
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Public Safety Department  
Office of the Governor  
Saipan, MP 96950

Mr. Hermenegildo Ortiz Quinones  
Secretary  
Division of Administrative Tickets  
Department of Transportation  
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Santurce, PR 00940

Mr. Milton A. Frett, Commissioner  
Virgin Islands Police Department  
Criminal Justice Complex  
Veterans Drive  
St. Thomas, VI 00802

Appendix D



NEW YORK



1B3AC77P3EK313174	01/31/95
PICK	1
1988 DODGE M2	
CHC102 COM X	
A standard 1D barcode representing the vehicle identification number.	

1  
9  
9  
5

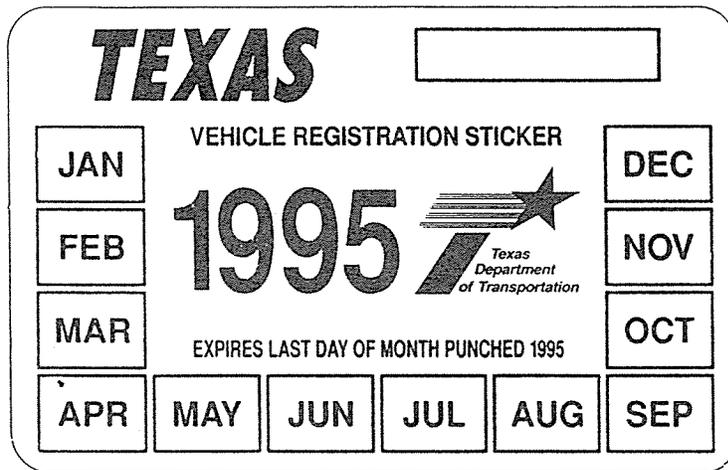
VEHICLE REGISTRATION

This is an example of a windshield emblem used by New York which was sent to the Legislative Reference Bureau. It is a test document without serial numbers or glue and computer printed with the information that is normally printed on the emblems. One of the numbers on this emblem is the license plate number for that vehicle. Also note that there is a general description of the vehicle (in this case "1988 DODGE").

## Appendix E

DIVISION OF MOTOR VEHICLE TITLES AND REGISTRATION ■ AUSTIN, TEXAS 78779-0001 ■ (512) 465-7611

### 1995 TEXAS WINDSHIELD VALIDATION STICKER



The new windshield validation sticker will combine the month and year on one sticker. The sticker will display the year of expiration in large type with the months shown around the border. Upon issuance, the appropriate month of expiration will be punched out by the issuing office.

Windshield validation stickers will be manufactured with an adhesive front and scored backing which will enable easy placement of the sticker. Upon expiration, the sticker can be removed without the aid of a razor blade. However, it will be made of a material which destructs when it is removed.

## Appendix F

### LIST OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS CONTACTED

- |     |  |      |  |
|-----|--|------|--|
| (1) | John H. Strandquist, CAE<br>Executive Director<br>American Association of Motor<br>Vehicle Administrators<br>4200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1100<br>Arlington, VA 22203                  | (8)  | Harry A. Takahashi<br>Director of Finance<br>Department of Finance<br>25 Aupuni St., Room 118<br>Hilo, HI 96720-4252   |
| (2) | Daniel N. Rosenblatt<br>Executive Director<br>International Association of Chiefs<br>of Police<br>515 N. Washington St.<br>Alexandria, VA 22314-2357                               | (9)  | Verna Yamase<br>Motor Vehicle Registration Officer<br>Motor Vehicle Registration<br>Department of Finance<br>4444 Rice St.<br>Building A, Suite 480<br>Lihue, HI 96766   |
| (3) | Eugene Uemura<br>Assistant Chief of Police<br>Police Department<br>City and County of Honolulu<br>801 S. Beretania St.<br>Honolulu, HI 96813                                       | (10) | Rex D. Johnson<br>Director of Transportation<br>Department of Transportation<br>State of Hawaii<br>869 Punchbowl St.<br>Honolulu, HI 96813-5097  |
| (4) | Calvin Fujita<br>Chief of Police<br>Police Department<br>County of Kauai<br>3060 Umi St.<br>Lihue, HI 96766  | (11) | Ed Shiinoki<br>Account Executive<br>Traffic Control Materials and<br>Safety and Security Systems<br>Divisions<br>3M Hawaii<br>4443 Malaai St.<br>P.O. Box 30048<br>Honolulu, HI 96820<br>(808) 422-2721<br>Fax: (808) 422-9557 |
| (5) | Victor V. Vierra<br>Chief of Police<br>Police Department<br>County of Hawaii<br>349 Kapiolani St.<br>Hilo, HI 96720-2702   |      |  |
| (6) | Dennis Kamimura<br>Administrator<br>Motor Vehicle and Licensing<br>Division<br>Department of Finance<br>City and County of Honolulu<br>1455 S. Beretania St.<br>Honolulu, HI 96814 |      |  |
| (7) | Henry Rosa<br>Manager<br>Division of Motor Vehicles and<br>Licensing<br>Department of Finance<br>County of Maui<br>1580 Kaahumanu Ave.<br>Wailuku, HI 96793                        |      |  |