

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Driving Overseas? Steer Clear of Bogus International Driving Permits

If you plan to travel overseas and drive while you're there, it's a good idea to get an international driving permit (IDP) to accompany your U.S. state-issued driver's license. But make sure your IDP is from one of two associations authorized to issue IDP's in the U.S. — the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA). According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, IDPs sold and issued by any other organization to U.S. residents are bogus and could cause problems with local authorities if you are caught driving with one.

What's an IDP?

An IDP is an official document that translates your U.S. state-issued driver's license into 10 foreign languages. Although many foreign countries don't recognize U.S. drivers' licenses, most countries accept IDPs that have been issued on behalf of the United States. Your IDP may not be valid unless you present it with your U.S. driver's license.

What does an official IDP look like?

An official IDP is a gray, multi-page booklet with "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" printed at the top of the cover, and the seal of either the AAA or AATA in the middle of the cover. Both AAA and AATA charge less than \$20 for an IDP. If you're asked to pay more, consider it a tip-off to a rip-off.

FTC attorneys have found that individuals or companies not authorized to issue IDPs on behalf of the U.S. government are selling fake IDPs over the Internet, through unsolicited email and in person for prices ranging from \$60 to \$400. If you buy a fake IDP, not only will you be paying for a worthless document, you also could be facing legal problems or travel delays if you're detained for using it to drive in a foreign country.

How can I get an official IDP?

You must be at least 18 years old and have a valid driver's license issued by a U.S. state or territory to buy an official IDP. For more information, contact your local AAA office or the AATA. To reach the AAA, check the White Pages of your telephone directory or visit www.aaa.com. To reach the AATA, call 1-650-294-7000 (M-F, 8:30-5:00 Pacific Time); fax: 1-650-294-7040; or email: contact@nationalautoclub.com; or visit www.nationalautoclub.com.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

