

FTC Consumer Alert

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

Ads for International Drivers' Licenses or Permits Could Be a Dead End

Too many points on your driver's license?

License been suspended or revoked?

Can't get a state-issued driver's license?

Want a license that can never be suspended or revoked?

If you're tempted by ads claiming that you can use an international driver's license (IDL) or an international driving permit (IDP) in place of your state-issued driver's license, it's a dead end. Although an IDP (sometimes incorrectly called an international driving license) is a real document when issued by the proper authorities, it is not a legal alternative to your state-issued license. If you are stopped by a law enforcement officer and present an IDL or an IDP as proof of your identity and authorization to drive, you could be arrested.

What's an IDP?

The United States is a party to a United Nations treaty that gives residents of one country the right to drive in other countries using the driver's license issued by the government where they live. This treaty created the *international driving permit* to make this arrangement easier. An IDP translates your state-issued driver's license into 10 languages so you can show it to officials in foreign countries to help them interpret your driver's license. If you're a U.S. resident, an IDP is useless within the U.S. IDPs are not intended to replace state-issued driver's licenses and should be used only as a supplement to a valid license when traveling in a foreign country. In addition, IDPs are not proof of identity.

The U.S. Department of State has authorized only two organizations to issue IDPs to U.S. residents. The organizations, the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA), are permitted to sell IDPs only to people who are at least 18 years old and only to those who have a valid driver's license issued by a U.S. state or territory. The AAA and the AATA charge \$10 for each IDP.

How Does an IDP Differ from a State-issued Driver's License?

A *driver's license* is a card that lets you drive a motor vehicle legally. It is issued by the state where you live, but allows you to drive anywhere in the U.S. and Canada. A driver's license also serves as valid proof of your identity to law enforcement officials. States require that you pass a series of exams to get your first license: a written exam on the "rules of the road," an eye test, and a road test. States also require that you provide proof of your identity, such as a passport, a valid driver's license from another state, or a birth certificate. The fee for a license varies by state.

How the IDP Scam Works

Ads and offers for fake IDLs and IDPs are showing up on websites and as spam email. They also are sold "on the street" and through storefront operations. The price for one of these fake documents can range from \$65 to \$350. Many local operations target non-native speakers through ads in foreign-language newspapers

that direct consumers to websites or local storefronts. The marketers falsely claim that their documents:

- authorize consumers to drive legally in the U.S., even if they don't have state-issued licenses or if their state-issued licenses have been suspended or revoked;
- can be used to avoid points or fines affecting state-issued drivers' licenses; and
- can be used as photo ID in the U.S.

FTC officials say all these claims are false. In fact, if you're a U.S. resident, and you're caught using an IDP in place of your state-issued driver's license, the consequences can be severe. You could be charged with driving without a license or driving with a suspended or revoked license. If you can't produce proof of your identity (for example, a valid driver's license, a state-issued identification card, valid immigration documents, or a passport), the officer can assume that you're trying to withhold your identity and arrest you.

For More Information

To learn about driver's license requirements in your state, contact your local department of motor vehicles. Check the Blue Pages of your telephone directory for the number, or visit the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators at www.aamva.org.

If you plan to drive overseas, contact your local AAA office or the AATA for more information about acquiring a legitimate IDP.

AAA – Check the White Pages of your telephone directory or visit www.aaa.com

AATA – Call: 650-294-7000 (M-F, 8:30-5:00 Pacific Time); fax: 650-294-7040; email: contact@nationalautoclub.com; or visit www.nationalautoclub.com

If you've been scammed by a seller of bogus IDLs or IDPs, report it to the FTC. 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.