

Vehicle licensing & insurance bulletin

New Temporary Operation Permit (TOP) character configurations

ICBC will introduce a new character configuration for Temporary Operation Permits (TOPs) starting September 14, 2025.

What action do I need to take?

This bulletin is for awareness only. Please share it with anyone who verifies TOPs or otherwise may be interested.

Key facts for law enforcement

Only the permit number is changing. All other aspects of the TOP remain the same.

Most new TOPs will display an alternating letter-number pattern, within the A0A0A0 to Z9Z9Z9 range.

Manually issued TOPs will keep the current format with a leading zero: 0A1B2C.

The letters I, O, and Q are still excluded to prevent confusion with 1 and 0.

No readability or systems impacts are expected. Automated Licence Plate Readers (ALPR) and backend systems (e.g., CPIC) do not require any updates.

Will TOPs still have six characters?

Yes. The new pattern increases available combinations while keeping the six-character maximum.

Why is the format changing?

The existing pattern is nearly exhausted. This change ensures each TOP and licence plate continues to have a unique number. The new format is projected to last over 20 years at current issuance rates.



TOP pattern examples

Type	Current pattern	New Pattern	Example
Standard TOP	#@#@#@	@#@#@#	A0A0A0 → Z9Z9Z9
Manual issuance (e.g. during system outage)	0#@#@#	No change	0A1B2C

Where # represents a number (0–9) and @ represents any letter (other than I, O, or Q.)

Background

TOPs may be issued to vehicles that are present in B.C. They may be purchased for a period of up to 15 days to allow for temporary operation of an otherwise unlicensed vehicle and for temporary insurance coverage.

Vehicle owners or lessees with vehicles that require a vehicle inspection may purchase a TOP valid for one day only to drive the vehicle to a designated inspection facility for the inspection and back again.

Laden commercial vehicles with a GVW over 5 000 kg may use a TOP for a single one-way trip between two points with no pick-up or drop-off of the load or partial load while on route.

Manual TOPs are issued if systems are unavailable in other exceptional cases. They are pre-printed forms with the permit number and dates completed by hand.

The first TOPs in B.C. date back to the early 20th century; the current character format has been in use since 1997.

Note on scope: this bulletin applies to TOPs for regular highway use. It does not apply to “Operation Permits” issued by R.C.M.P. or municipal police for non-conforming vehicles in accordance with Motor Vehicle Act Regulations Division 24 (see [Bulletin 2014 | 11](#) and page 2 of [Bulletin 2012 | 8](#).)

Reference

• Motor Vehicle Act	section 3	Registration, licence and insurance
• Motor Vehicle Act Regulations	Div. 14	Temporary Operation Permits
• Vehicle licensing and insurance bulletins		
• License Plate Standard, ed. 3 (AAMVA)		

For questions about this bulletin, contact:

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For validation of specific TOPs, continue using the secure police line.



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Canadian Border Services Agency

Law Enforcement

BC Association of Chiefs of Police
(Municipal Police forces, PRIME-BC,
BC Highway Patrol, RCMP)

Other Jurisdictions

Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA)

American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)

Registrar of Imported Vehicles

RIV Policy, Standards & Enforcement
(Compliance Manager)

Transport Canada

Motor Vehicle Regulation Enforcement
(Director)

Road Safety and Motor Vehicle Regulation
(Director General)

Union of B.C. Municipalities

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

Vehicle Sales Authority of B.C.

ICBC

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