



A New Design for Temporary (Paper) License Plates

Fraudulent paper license plates have become a **huge issue for law enforcement in Texas**. It is estimated that about ½ of temporary license plates are legitimate and the other half are fraudulent. For homeowners' associations, the existence of temporary plates can raise suspicions among other residents – sometimes for good reason, sometimes not.

This leadership brief outlines the **issues around temporary tags, changes in the current design, and new legislation to continue to reduce the number of fraudulent plates**. This brief is intended to provide you with information on recent changes: execution of laws around illegal paper tags remain with law enforcement professionals.

The Problem

Lax regulations make it **relatively easy for any Texan to register as a car dealer**. Texans can get a dealership license — and with it, access to the tag system — for about \$800. A lack of oversight means **licensed dealers can print an unlimited number of**



temporary tags – sanctioned by the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) - for cars they never actually sold. The dealers then sell those tags on the black market, staying under police radar.

Since the bad tags come from the state system and look exactly like good tags, it's all but impossible for officers to know at a glance that the information associated with the tag — for instance, the name and address of the car's owner — is false.

Fake paper plates aren't prohibitively expensive for buyers – who can find them for between \$45 and \$60. Since they're easy to generate in large quantities, **temporary tags can mean lots of money for the fraudulent dealers who sell them.**

Law enforcement says temporary tags are altered and sold to avoid safety inspection, emissions testing, and vehicle registration, and to commit other illegal offenses to avoid being caught and to supplement illegal income.

"The State of Texas is just completely inundated with fraudulent paper tags," said Grand Prairie Police Chief Daniel Scesney. "We are seeing an issue with officers not knowing who's behind the wheel when they walk up to a car. Violent criminals are using them to hide their identity when committing violent crime."

Scesney has become an ardent advocate for change. In November, fellow officer Brandon Tsai died during a chase when he spotted someone driving with a fake temporary tag.

The New Design

At the end of last year, the



DMV released a new design for temporary tags to include enhanced security features aimed to reduce fraud. **Dealers began issuing the redesigned tags on December 9.**

Features in the **new**

temporary tag design include:

- Enhanced depiction of the tag expiration date, vehicle year and make, and name of issuing dealer.
- Texas flag watermark.
- Identification of the specific type of tag issued.
- Font selection and size that maximize readability of primary components.

- Active and passive security features identifiable by law enforcement.
- Numerous pieces of embedded data and text, linked to law enforcement databases, can be created only by internal TxDMV computer systems.

Unfortunately, the change in the design of temporary paper tags may not be enough to stem the volume of fraudulent paper tags.

New Legislation

Despite the change in design, Scesney said Grand Prairie Police officers recently saw five cars with fake tags in just one hour.

"I wish I could tell you spotting these was rare, but that is not the case. They are everywhere," he said. "Just for the purpose of seeing how simple it was, we created our own fake paper tag. It took us about 45 minutes to build the template, and now,



we could churn them out as often as we wanted to. That includes the QR code which was added. We even put a fake web address to marry up to the QR code."

Representative Craig Goldman (District 9, in and around Fort Worth) introduced **House Bill 718**, "relating to the issuance of temporary tags and license plates by a motor vehicle dealer". For the most part, HB 718 would **end the use of paper tags**, require dealers or sellers to enter the car's information into a database before assigning a tag to a car and assign dealers a set number of metal tags to use.

The specific mechanics of how HB 718 would work has yet to be drafted, but the Texas DMV already allows people to transfer personalized license plates to new cars, and some counties already have processes in place that may provide a working template. An additional cost to buyers is unlikely since it would not increase the number or type of metal plates to be issued.

The bill has yet to be referred to committee but, when it does, there will be an opportunity to testify - both in person and electronically.

So far, this is the only legislation **to address the problems of fraudulent paper tags**. We will keep up with next steps with HB 718 - and very much appreciate the help of **Representative Goldman's Chief of Staff** in providing additional information on the legislation.

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