

What's Behind the Label?

Why Proper Commercial Vehicle Safety Certification is Critical

Vehicle safety certification isn't just a label on the driver's door. It's a legal declaration that a vehicle complies with all applicable Federal/Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (F/CMVSS) — and it's required by federal law. For leasing companies, dealers and fleets, certification protects your drivers, your customers and your business as well as other motorists.

What You Need to Know

Vehicle Dealerships: Federal law prohibits selling, importing or delivering a vehicle that does not comply with applicable safety standards and is not properly certified. Selling a non-compliant vehicle can create serious legal exposure.

Fleets & CMV Owners/Operators: Providing a safe workplace includes ensuring vehicles are properly certified. Owning and operating uncertified vehicles increases liability and regulatory compliance risk.

Leasing Companies/FMCs: When you own vehicles but don't control how they're built or used, certification provides confidence in the operations on both sides of the acquisition process.

The Risks of Getting it Wrong

Uncertified vehicles can result in:

- Vehicle recalls
- Out-of-service orders
- Civil penalties and fines
- Increased liability exposure
- Potential warranty complications

Every Company in the Build Chain Has Manufacturer Responsibilities

When a new vehicle is upfitted, modified, or completed, the company performing that work becomes a manufacturer under federal law. That carries specific certification responsibilities, including:

- Maintaining required registration with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and/or holding a valid National Safety Mark (NSM) from Transport Canada
- Understanding which F/CMVSS requirements apply
- Performing required weight and compliance analyses
- Producing and applying the correct certification label
- Maintaining proper documentation

How to Protect Your Fleet, Dealership or Organization

- Verify that your vehicles have a certification label on the driver's door pillar.
- Confirm the upfitter is registered with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (U.S.) or issued a National Safety Mark (Canada).
- Request documentation such as weight analyses and quality sign-off forms.
- Work with upfitters who are willing to decline non-compliant configurations. A reputable upfitter will prioritize compliance — even if it means saying “no.”
- Ensure your upfitter partners have formal certification plans and an understanding of the certification roles in the manufacturing and sales process.

Bottom Line

Certification is about safety — and it's required by law. Before assuming vehicle upfitting is just bolting equipment onto a truck, make sure a compliant certification process is in place.

The certification label is not a sticker. It represents legal compliance, reduced risk, and a commitment to safety by the manufacturer.

Visit ntea.com/vehiclecertification for additional resources and information.