<https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/problems-getting-title-to-my-vehicle>

**Problems Getting Title to My Vehicle**

**Authored By:** [**Northwest Justice Project**](https://nwjustice.org) **LSC Funded**

This explains what to do if you are having problems with getting title to your vehicle. Example: You bought a car from someone who does not have a copy of the car’s title. It covers the Department of Licensing (DOL)’s procedures for getting title in your name. These are usually cheaper and easier to use than filing in court and how you can file in district court asking the judge to award you legal ownership of a vehicle. #0324EN

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**Read Online**

* [Should I use this?](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/problems-getting-title-to-my-vehicle#a)
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**Should I use this?**

**Yes, if** you are having a hard time getting title to your vehicle. **Example**: You bought a car from someone who does not have a copy of its title.

We explain

* The [Department of Licensing (DOL)](http://www.dol.wa.gov/)’s procedures for getting title in your name. These are usually cheaper and easier than filing in court.
* How to file in district court for an order awarding you legal ownership of a vehicle.  [RCW 46.12.680](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=46.12.680).  **RCW stands for** [Revised Code of Washington](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/). The RCW’s are Washington State’s laws.

**How do I normally get proof of vehicle ownership?**

A vehicle’s buyer and seller must both turn paperwork in to the [Washington Department of Licensing (DOL)](http://www.dol.wa.gov/) **within five days of the vehicle’s sale**. The seller signs over the title to you. The DOL then issues you a new title.

If you are paying on the car, the title lists you as the registered owner and the seller as the legal owner until you finish making payments. [Reporting the Sale or Transfer of Your Car](http://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/reporting-the-sale-or-transfer-of-your-car?ref=gmujQ) has more info.

**What if the seller lost the title?**

A seller who has lost or misplaced the title can apply for a new copy and sign it over to you. The seller should use DOL’s [Affidavit of Loss form](http://www.dol.wa.gov/forms/420040.pdf).

**What if the title is in some other registered or legal owner's name?**

You can ask the last registered or legal owner to sign and file a [release of interest](http://www.dol.wa.gov/forms/420040.pdf).

Example: You have finished making your payments on the car. You can ask the legal owner to sign and file a release of interest.

**How else can I get title?**

If you cannot get title from a seller or other person you got the vehicle from, you have options. DOL calls all these applying for “ownership in doubt:”

* You can ask DOL to issue a three-year **registration without title**. This converts to full ownership (giving you the title) if after three years nobody contests (challenges) the vehicle’s ownership.
* You can file a bond with DOL for a three-year period and get a bonded title.  The bond amount must be equal to one and a half times the vehicle’s value.
* You can file a petition in court for a judgment of ownership. [Quieting Title to Your Vehicle](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/quieting-title-to-your-vehicle) has forms and instructions.

[RCW 46.12.680(2)(a) and (b)](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=46.12.680).

The first two procedures are for when both of these are true:

* The seller never gave you title OR never had the title.
* No other known person claims to own the vehicle.

In this situation, it is easiest and cheapest to get a three-year registration without title (see above), and then wait for three years to get a full title. Get the [DOL Bonded Title or Three Year Registration without Title Affidavit form](http://www.dol.wa.gov/forms/420008.pdf)

**Should I file a court action?**

Maybe, if, for example

* The person who sold you the car failed to file the bill of sale and transfer title.
* The used car dealer that sold you the car, whose name is on the title, went out of business.
* The lender of your car loan went out of business.

[Quieting Title to Your Vehicle](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/quieting-title-to-your-vehicle) has more info, forms and instructions.

**The court awarded me the vehicle in my divorce. My ex disappeared OR refuses to give me title. What can I do?**

It depends on if your final divorce order had the car’s ownership info in it:

* year
* make
* model
* VIN (Vehicle Identification #)

If it has this info, you do not need to go back to court. You do need a certified copy of the final divorce order from the clerk of the court that entered it.

**My Final Divorce Order has that info. What do I do?**

Get a certified copy of your Final Divorce Order from the court clerk. There is a small fee.

Take the certified copy to your local [Department of Licensing vehicle licensing office](https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/dolprod/vehoffices/). They will transfer title into your name.

**My Final Divorce Order does not have that info. Now what?**

You should file a Motion for Clarification of Final Divorce Order to add this ownership information to the decree:

* Year, make, & model
* VIN (Vehicle Identification #)

[Filing a Motion for Clarification of Final Divorce Order to Get Title to Your Vehicle](http://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/filing-a-motion-for-clarification-of-dissolution-decree-to-get-title-to-your-vehicle?ref=IKVVc) has forms and instructions.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.  
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**Related Resources**

* [Filing a Motion for Clarification of Final Divorce Order to Get Title to Your Vehicle](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/filing-a-motion-for-clarification-of-dissolution-decree-to-get-title-to-your-vehicle)
* [Quieting Title to Your Vehicle](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/quieting-title-to-your-vehicle)
* [Reporting the Sale or Purchase of a Car](https://www.washingtonlawhelp.org/resource/reporting-the-sale-or-transfer-of-your-car)

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