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New truck regs.; new rules for interstate trucking

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Just when you thought that government had come up with every possible way to regulate your business, along comes the federal Unified Carrier Registration (UCR) program. It means that, as of November 1st, you will have to have a special federal registration for each truck or trailer weighing over 10,000 lbs. and for every passenger vehicle that carries 11 or more people (including the driver), if you cross state lines.

The state Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (PUC) estimates that almost 6,000 Rhode Island businesses will be affected.

"This rule affects every commercial vehicle over 10,000 lbs. that crosses a state line for whatever reason," the PUC's Terry Mercer told The Rhode Island Builder Report.

That's true even if you're taking a shortcut across a sliver of Massachusetts or Connecticut to get to another part of Rhode Island, Mercer said. He did point out that the 10,000 lbs. is gross vehicle weight (GVW) only, and doesn't include the weight of passengers or equipment.

"If a contractor only uses a garden-variety pickup truck, which may not have a GVW high enough, he isn't affected. This would have more to do with larger pickups, flatbeds or panel trucks."

Mercer said that, to be sure, truck owners should check the manufacturer's information plate, usually on the end panel of the driver's-side door or under the hood, for the official GVW.

The UCR replaces the former Single State Registration System (SSRS) for registering the operators of vehicles traveling between states. They're the same rules that apply to long-haul truckers.

"This is just another government fundraiser," said Rhode Island Builders Association president Thomas McNulty. "It will affect many of our members. There are few Rhode Island contractors who don't work in Massachusetts or Connecticut. In many parts of Rhode Island, you can't drive from here to there without crossing the state line, sometimes more than once."

Registrations in Rhode Island are expected to generate \$2.4 million in the first year, according to the PUC.

Practically speaking, any contractor with a qualifying vehicle will have to register it with the PUC by November 1st. The annual registration fee will vary according to the number of vehicles a company operates. For instance, companies with one or two qualifying trucks or trailers would pay \$39 annually, while one with from three to five would pay \$116. For between six and 20, the fee would be \$231, and from 21 to 100, \$806. And on up from there.

"Since this is a new program with several thousand potential UCR registrations in Rhode Island, we strongly encourage business owners to register and pay the registration fee online," Mercer said.

Go to www.ucr.in.gov and follow the step-by-step process. If you haven't already, you will soon receive a notice from the PUC including a registration form. As an alternate to on-line registration, you can fill out that form and send it, along with a certified check or money order, to the Division of

Public Utilities and Carriers, 89 Jefferson Blvd., Warwick, RI 02888.

To encourage compliance with the new rules, the federal government has allowed states to increase fines for unregistered trucks. The fine in Rhode Island will increase from \$75 per truck to \$300.

For more information, call the PUC at (401) 941-4500 or visit <http://www.ripuc.org/>.

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