

NHTSA INFORMATION ON MOTOR VEHICLE LIGHTING INVENTIONS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) receives many letters from persons who have ideas which they believe might enhance motor vehicle lighting. For this reason, the agency has prepared this information sheet to provide general information on this topic.

First, the agency has no authority to “approve” or “disapprove” lighting inventions. What we can do is to advise writers how their idea relates to 49 U.S.C. Chapter 301, Motor Vehicle Safety, the basic safety statute we administer, and the Federal motor vehicle safety standard on motor vehicle lighting, Standard No. 108, Lamps, Reflective Devices, and Associated Equipment. Standard No. 108 specifies requirements for lighting devices and their performance which must be met when a vehicle is sold to its first owner. Further, all replacement lighting equipment must comply with the same requirements that apply to the original equipment that it replaces.

Supplementary vehicle equipment of any sort is not allowed if it impairs the performance of the original lighting equipment required by Standard No. 108. An impairment ordinarily exists if the supplementary equipment:

- Changes the performance of any required original equipment lamp.
- Is an additional lamp whose color is other than red, amber, or white.
- Is an additional lamp intended to operate with a required lamp, unless it performs identically to the required lamp.
- Flashes in use.
- Is a cover, filter, grille, logo, etc. in front of or over a required lamp.
- Contains a text intended to be read by drivers or other persons.
- Has the potential of confusing, even momentarily, other drivers.

If you have any questions about whether your lighting idea would create one of these impairments, you may write for an interpretation to Chief Counsel, NHTSA, Room 5219, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20590.

Generally, if supplementary lighting equipment is not permissible as original equipment, 49 U.S.C. 30122, Making safety devices and elements inoperative, prohibits it from being installed in the aftermarket by a manufacturer, distributor, dealer or motor vehicle repair business. Owner-installed equipment is subject to state and local law, which may follow Federal law.

Finally, please be aware that the agency does not have the resources to evaluate lighting ideas that are submitted by members of the public. We published a policy statement on November 4, 1998, that explains this position in detail, and a copy is enclosed for your information.

NHTSA appreciates your interest in motor vehicle safety.