

Vehicle Modifications

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There are times when a driver will contact us to ask if they can modify their vehicle in some way to accommodate a medical condition. The sections below outline what the driver must do if they want to operate with a specific type of modification.

[Airbags](#)

[Hand Controls](#)

[Seat Belt Exception](#)

[Window Tinting](#)

Airbags

Occasionally, a driver will call to ask if their airbags can be legally disabled. They might have a condition (e.g. osteoporosis) that would make airbags potentially dangerous or even lethal. A mechanic won't disable airbags without getting federal permission to do so. This permission is something that can be requested from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) by following these steps:

1. Fill out a Request for [Air Bag On-Off Switch](#)
2. Get a letter from your healthcare provider (on doctor's letterhead) explaining the reason that the driver needs to turn off their airbags.
3. Fax both documents listed above to NHTSA - FAX: 202-493-2833 (all address info is on the form, so drivers can also mail the information in).

A decision can take up to 6 weeks, but the driver can call and ask questions or see if there's any way to expedite the process by calling the NHTSA hotline at 1-888-327-4236. If it's extremely urgent, email derrick.lewis@dot.gov or call the airbag division at 202-366-6982.

Hand Controls

The question we need to ask ourselves when the topic of "hand controls" comes up is "what is the underlying cause for the driver needing hand controls?".

Is a Medical Report Needed?

- **IF the driver has some medical condition that has caused them to get hand controls** (e.g. an amputation caused by diabetes), then we need to get a *current medical report form (MV3644)* from the driver to make sure that they are medically safe to operate a motor vehicle. If they are deemed 'safe to drive' and our concerns about the underlying medical condition are quelled, THEN we send them in for *MRF-ALL TESTS* (knowledge, signs and skills). The reason we send the driver with an underlying medical condition for all of the tests is to keep consistent with other drivers that are medically required to have testing done.
- **IF the driver was in an accident that caused them to need hand controls** (such as when a person becomes partially paralyzed), the underlying cause was the accident and we don't need a medical report form. All the driver needs to do is go to the driver's station and schedule/pass a road test so they can prove that they have mastered the 'hand controlled vehicle' and get the correct restrictions on their license.

Hand-control training

- **A note about hand-control training:** we do not tell drivers how to get trained when they modify their vehicle for hand-controls. The way they learn to use the modified vehicle is up to them. We figure out if they are safe to operate their modified vehicle when they go to the driver station and take their road test.
- **Where can a driver go to get hand-controls for their car:** a driver could ask their doctor or physical therapist where they could go to get alterations done to their car.

Does the driver need an instruction permit if they have a valid DL?

No.

Drivers who currently have a valid DL, but now need hand-controls are not required to get an instruction permit. They can keep their current DL and practice using the hand-controls using their current valid license. As long as we don't need to check them out medically, they will be able to go to the station when they are comfortable with the hand-

controls and do a road test, so that the license can be properly restricted.

Seat Belt Exception

Seat Belts do not need to be worn if there is some medical reason for this. A written statement by a licensed physician must be carried by the driver or in the car. The statement details are specific and described completely in Chapter [Trans 315.03](#).

Window Tinting

Window Tinting is allowed if there are medical reasons for doing so. A written statement by a licensed physician must be carried by the driver or in the car. The statement details are specific and described completely in Chapter [Trans 305.32\(4\)\(b\)3](#).