

Tachographs - the Basics

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Tachographs: the basics

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Introduction

Tachographs are devices that record information about driving time, speed and distance. This information is used to monitor compliance with drivers' hours rules.

If you drive a bus, coach, lorry or other vehicle under the European Union (EU) drivers' hours rules or the European Agreement concerning the work of Crews of Vehicles Engaged in International Road Transport (AETR) drivers' hours rules, you will almost always need to use a tachograph. However, if the vehicle you drive is exempt from the EU drivers' hours rules, you will not have to use a tachograph, even if one has been fitted to the vehicle.

There are two types of tachograph: analogue and digital. Analogue tachographs record the driver's periods of duty on a wax-coated paper disc, while digital tachographs store the information on an electronic 'smart card'.

By law, all commercial vehicles first registered on or after 1 May 2006 must be fitted with digital tachographs. However, you can continue to operate an analogue tachograph in any vehicle registered before that date.

This guide explains what analogue and digital tachographs are, when they need to be used, and what you - as an operator or driver - need to do to comply with the rules on their use.

What is the difference between an analogue and digital tachograph?

The main difference between analogue and digital tachographs is that digital tachographs use a smart card to record data instead of the round record sheets or charts used in analogue tachographs.

Analogue tachographs

The analogue tachograph records your driving information using three styluses that cut traces into a circular, wax-coated chart. They measure the:

- speed of the vehicle
- distance travelled by the vehicle
- driver activity, also known as the 'mode'

The analogue tachograph also contains areas for manual entries, measuring activities such as:

- the entire daily working period
- any rest periods
- any work done outside the vehicle

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For more information, see our guides on [drivers and analogue tachographs](#) and [operators and analogue tachographs](#).

Digital tachographs

Digital tachographs consist of two visible parts inside the vehicle - the vehicle unit (VU) and the speedometer. The VU receives a signal from a sender unit located in the vehicle's gearbox. This signal is then sent from the VU to the speedometer unit where the driver can see it.

[See a diagram of the different parts that make up a digital tachograph - Opens in a new window.](#)

The VU is always set to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). All records are set against this time.

The VU holds the system memory, including data about:

- all drivers of the vehicle and their periods of driving for about 12 months
- any faults that have occurred
- any attempts to tamper with the system
- vehicle speeding
- calibration details, when the tachograph is checked at an approved calibration centre
- when it has been accessed by control officers from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) or the police

Smart cards

In addition to storing data on the VU, digital tachographs also store your driving and vehicle data separately on a plastic, credit card-sized card known as a smart card. For more information, see our guide on [drivers and digital tachographs](#).

Four types of smart cards that can be used by digital tachographs:

- driver cards - for drivers
- company cards - for operators
- workshop cards - for approved calibration centres only
- control cards - for VOSA and police enforcement use only

A smart card is valid for five years. If it is lost, stolen or stops working during that period, a new card will be issued for the same validity period as the original.

For details of current fees for smart cards, see the page in this guide on [digital tachograph installation costs and smart card fees](#).

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Driver smart cards

By law, you must use a driver smart card if you are driving any vehicle under EU driver's hours rules that is fitted with a digital tachograph.

You are only allowed to hold one driver smart card. You must never use someone else's card, or allow another driver to use yours.

You can apply for smart cards at your local Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) office or by calling the DVLA. For more information, see our guide on [drivers and digital tachographs](#).

You can also order a smart card application pack online:

[Request an application form \(Form ST1A\) for a driver digital tachograph smart card from the DVLA.](#)

Company smart cards

If you're a business owner, you can order smart cards from the DVLA in the company's name. The main purpose of company smart cards is to act as an electronic key to access and protect data held in the digital tachograph VU unit.

If you're a business owner, your company can have up to 2,232 smart cards. For more information, see our guide on [operators and digital tachographs](#).

[Request an application form \(Form ST2A\) for a company digital tachograph smart card from the DVLA.](#)

When do you need to use a tachograph?

If you drive under European Union (EU) drivers' hours rules, you must use a tachograph. The only exception is if you're driving a vehicle that is being used to collect sea coal. In that case, you are still covered by the EU drivers' hours rules, but you do not have to use a tachograph.

You will also need to use a tachograph if you are driving under the European Agreement concerning the work of Crews of Vehicles Engaged in International Road Transport (AETR) rules.

To find out if you are covered by either of these sets of rules, see our guides on the [EU drivers' hours rules](#) and the [AETR drivers' hours rules](#).

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If you are not working under EU or AETR rules, you won't have to use a tachograph, even if the vehicle is fitted with one.

Declaring a tachograph exemption when presenting a vehicle for its annual test

There are some vehicles exempt from the European Union (EU) rules requiring a tachograph, regardless of where the vehicle is driven within the EU.

For a list of **heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)** that are exempt, [download the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency's \(VOSA's\) form 75 for declaring a tachograph exemption for a goods vehicle \(PDF, 29K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

For a list of exempt **public services vehicles (PSVs)**, [download VOSA's form 658 for declaring a tachograph exemption for a PSV \(PDF, 30K\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

If your vehicle is fitted with a tachograph, but you only use it as a speedometer, you must make sure that:

- all the seals are intact
- the tachograph has been initially calibrated
- the tachograph is fitted with both the calibration and K factor plaques, in the instances of agricultural vehicles like horseboxes

If you are presenting a vehicle for its annual test at a VOSA test station, and want to declare it exempt from tachograph requirements, you'll need to complete VOSA form 75 for goods vehicles, or form 658 for public service vehicles.

When is it compulsory to have a vehicle fitted with a digital tachograph?

Tachographs - also referred to in legislation as 'recording equipment' - are currently governed by Regulation (EEC) 3821/85. The technical specifications of current tachographs are set out in Annex 1 of this regulation.

There are some exemptions from these rules, but in general, all new vehicles first registered on or after 1 May 2006 must be fitted with a digital tachograph. However, you can continue to use analogue tachographs fitted to vehicles registered before that date.

How tachograph rules are enforced

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Under the current law, Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) examiners have the authority to:

- inspect your vehicles
- prohibit and direct your vehicles
- investigate any possible breaches of regulations
- instigate, conduct and appear at magistrates' court hearings

If an infringement is found in your records, the law protects you from conviction if you can prove that you took all reasonable steps to make sure that your driver kept proper records.

Infringements of GB drivers' hours rules

The GB law protects from conviction in court domestic drivers who can prove that because of unforeseen circumstances, they were unavoidably delayed in finishing a journey and had to breach the rules. You are also protected if it is discovered that any driver was involved in other driving jobs that you could not have known about.

For information on rules that cover drivers' hours, taking breaks, vehicles that are exempt from the rules and penalties that you may face if you breach those rules, you can read our guide on [GB drivers' hours rules](#)

Infringements of European Union (EU) drivers' hours rules

The EU law protects from conviction in court those drivers who can prove that, because of unforeseen circumstances, they were unavoidably delayed in finishing a journey and breached the rules.

Under the EU rules, the transport company is liable for any infringements committed by its driver. However, you will not be held responsible for these offences if you can show that at the time of the infringement, your driver's work was being organised in full consideration of the rules, and in particular that:

- no payments were made that encouraged breaches
- work was properly organised
- the driver was properly instructed
- regular checks were made

For information about rules for drivers' hours and breaks, including how to comply, which vehicles are exempt and any penalties that you may face if you breach those rules, you can read our guide on [EU drivers' hours rules](#).

Penalties for infringements of the drivers' hours rules in Great Britain

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Part VI of the Transport Act 1968 (as amended) sets out maximum fines that can be imposed by a court of law if you - as a driver or operator - are convicted of breaking drivers' hours rules.

Maximum penalties for drivers hours' rules breaches

Breach	Penalty
Failure to observe driving time, break or rest period rules	Fine up to £2,500 (Level 4)
Failure to make or keep records under UK rules	Fine up to £2,500 (Level 4)
Failure to install a tachograph	Fine up to £5,000 (Level 5)
Failure to use a tachograph	Fine up to £5,000 (Level 5)
Failure to hand over records relating to recording equipment as requested by an enforcement officer	Fine up to £5,000
False entry or alteration of a record with the intent to deceive	On summary conviction - fine of £5,000 / On indictment - two years' imprisonment
Altering or forging the seal on a tachograph with the intent to deceive	On summary conviction - fine of £5,000 / On indictment - two years' imprisonment
Failure to take all reasonable steps to ensure that contractually agreed transport time schedules respect EU rules	Fine up to £2,500 (Level 4)

Digital tachograph installation costs and smart card fees.

It costs approximately £200 to fit a tachograph to a 'new' vehicle that's not yet in service, but can cost between £500 and £1000 if you are retro-fitting to a vehicle that's already in service.

Smart card fees

When digital tachographs were introduced in August 2005, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) became the card-issuing authority for the UK.

To get driver card application forms and help, you can call the DVLA Tachograph Smart Card Helpline on Tel 0300 790 6109. Alternatively, you can complete the online form to order your driver smart card application pack. [Request an application form \(Form ST1A\) for a driver digital tachograph smart card from the DVLA.](#)

Or, if you're a commercial transport operator, you can [request an application form \(Form ST2A\) for a company digital tachograph smart card from the DVLA.](#)

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These are the current fees for various smart cards:

Smart card fees

Transaction	Driver Card	Company Card	Workshop Card	Control Card
Card Application	£38	£38	£0	£0
Renewal	£19	£19	£0	£0
Replacement - Lost/Stolen/Damaged	£19	£19	£0	£0
Exchange	£0	£38	£0	£0
Malfunction	£0	£0	£0	£0

Find approved tachograph and speed limiter centres

All digital and analogue tachographs used for recording driving activities must be properly installed, calibrated and sealed by a Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) approved fitting centre. Your tachograph must also be checked every two years and recalibrated every six years. This must also be done at a VOSA-approved tachograph fitting centre.

To find your nearest tachograph or speed limiter centre, you can call the VOSA Helpline on Tel 0300 123 9000. Alternatively, you can [download a list of Approved Tachograph Centres from the VOSA website \(XLS, 134K\) - Opens in a new window](#). You can also [find a list of Approved Speedlimiter Centres on the VOSA website \(XLS, 323K\) - Opens in a new window](#).

Helplines

VOSA Helpline

0300 123 9000

Related guides on businesslink.gov.uk

[Download the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency's \(VOSA's\) guide to drivers' hours and tachographs rules for goods vehicles \(PDF, 2.24MB\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Download VOSA's guide to drivers' hours and tachographs rules for passenger-carrying vehicles \(PDF, 2.99MB\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Request an application form \(Form](#)

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[ST1A\) for a driver digital tachograph smart card from the DVLA](#) | [Drivers and analogue tachographs](#) | [Drivers and digital tachographs](#) | [Operators and analogue tachographs](#) | [Drivers' hours rules: the basics](#) | [EU drivers' hours rules](#) | [Tachographs: the basics](#) | [AETR drivers' hours rules](#) | [Drive under mixed drivers' hours rules](#) | [Download the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency's \(VOSA's\) form 75 for declaring a tachograph exemption for a goods vehicle \(PDF, 29K\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Download form 658 for declaring a tachograph exemption for a PSV \(PDF, 30K\) - Opens in a new window](#) | [Operators and digital tachographs](#) | [Vehicles exempt from drivers' hours rules](#) | [GB drivers' hours rules](#) | [Download VOSA's information on new regulations for road speed limiters \(PDF, 134K\) - Opens in a new window](#) |

Related web sites you might find useful

[Use our Transport Direct interactive tool to plan your journey - Opens in a new window](#)

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