Selling your car: the paperwork.

For a private-party sale in California. Get the papers ready **before** you list the car, and keep a copy of everything you sign.

1 Before you list it

GET READY

- [ ] Find the **California Certificate of Title** (pink slip). Lost it? Apply with **REG 227**
- [ ] Loan on the car? Ask the lender how the lien is released (lienholder signs the title, or a **REG 166** Lien Satisfied)
- [ ] Get a **smog check**: the seller must give the buyer a valid smog certificate (Vehicle Code 24007). It's valid for **90 days**
- [ ] Collect service records, both keys and the owner's manual

2 At the sale

TOGETHER, IN PERSON

- [ ] Sign the title as seller (and the lienholder, if any). Write the buyer's name and the odometer as the title asks
- [ ] Fill out **REG 262** Vehicle/Vessel Transfer and Reassignment (odometer disclosure and more) when needed
- [ ] Fill out and sign a **REG 135** Bill of Sale: price, date, both names
- [ ] Hand over the smog certificate, keys, manual and records
- [ ] Get paid in a way you can verify before you hand over the title
- [ ] Remove your toll transponder and personal items; erase your phone and garage codes

Sale record

Buyer's name _____

Buyer's address _____

Phone _____

Date and time of sale _____

Price _____

Odometer at sale _____

3 After the sale

WITHIN 5 DAYS

- [ ] Submit the **Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability** (NRL, REG 138) online at dmv.ca.gov **within 5 days**
- [ ] Write down the buyer's name, address and the date and time of the sale
- [ ] Keep copies or photos of the signed title, REG 262, REG 135 and smog certificate
- [ ] Call your insurer about the car once the sale is done

When the seller doesn't provide smog

- Vehicles **4 or fewer model years old**: no inspection at transfer; the buyer pays a smog transfer fee instead
- **Electric vehicles** are exempt
- Transfers between spouse or domestic partner, sibling, child, parent, grandparent or grandchild are exempt
- "As is" does **not** excuse the seller from the smog requirement

Special cases

- Owner has died: **REG 5** Affidavit for Transfer Without Probate
- Gift or family transfer: **REG 256** Statement of Facts
- Title lost: **REG 227** (section 5 notarized if there's a lienholder)

Forms at a glance

Title	California Certificate of Title (pink slip)
REG 262	Transfer and reassignment, odometer
REG 135	Bill of Sale
REG 138	Release of Liability (NRL), seller
REG 227	Replacement or transfer of title
REG 256	Statement of Facts
REG 166	Lien Satisfied
REG 31	Verification of Vehicle

General information from the California DMV and BAR, checked October 2026; not legal or tax advice. Forms and rules change: get current forms and fees at dmv.ca.gov.

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Buying from a private seller: the paperwork.

Check the papers **before** you pay. Then you, the buyer, report the change of ownership to the DMV **within 10 days**.

1 Before you pay

CHECK

- [ ] Title is a **California title** in the seller's name; the VIN matches the dash and the door jamb
- [ ] No lienholder listed, or the lien release is in hand
- [ ] Title brand checked: salvage, revived salvage, junk, flood, lemon law buyback
- [ ] **Smog certificate** dated within the last 90 days (unless an exemption applies)
- [ ] Vehicle history report and a free NMVTIS check; open recalls at nhtsa.gov/recalls
- [ ] Independent pre-purchase inspection done
- [ ] Insurance set up for the car before you drive it home

2 At the handover

DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT

- [ ] The **signed title** (seller, and lienholder if any)
- [ ] **REG 262** with the odometer reading, when needed
- [ ] **REG 135** Bill of Sale with the price and date
- [ ] The smog certificate
- [ ] All keys, the manual and the records
- [ ] A photo of the seller's ID next to the title (ask first)

Sale record

Seller's name _____

Seller's address _____

Phone _____

Date and time of sale _____

Price paid _____

Odometer at sale _____

3 At the DMV

WITHIN 10 DAYS

- [ ] Report the transfer **within 10 days**: online, by mail or by appointment at dmv.ca.gov. Late transfer penalties apply
- [ ] Pay **use tax** at the rate for **your** address, not the seller's
- [ ] Pay transfer and registration fees: estimate them with the **DMV Fee Calculator**
- [ ] Family transfer or gift? Ask about a use-tax exemption with **REG 256**
- [ ] Out-of-state car? You'll also need **REG 31** Verification of Vehicle
- [ ] Your new title usually arrives by mail in **15–30 days**

Estimate the use tax for your city with our free California car sales tax calculator: irvineautosales.com/tools/ (rates change; check CDTFA).

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