

License plates to be replaced

Thursday, 25 January 2007

Worn-out North Carolina license plates will get a facelift this spring, as the state Department of Motor Vehicles plans to replace about 600,000 of the oldest plates for newly-designed ones.

The new plates will remain mostly the same, with the "First in Flight" design, but will have red numbers and letters replacing the current blue ones.

The plates are expected to be issued beginning in mid-April, with the state focusing first on older plates.

"We've got some plates that have been on the road since '82 and '83," said Marge Howell, spokeswoman for the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles. "The need is there from the standpoint of protecting drivers and helping law enforcement."

The older plates' "reflectivity" have deteriorated, Howell said, which can pose a problem for officers who need to verify identification.

In 2008, the state will issue 500,000 more new plates featuring the red numbers and letters.

When drivers receive their registration renewal notices, a red note will be attached if they are due to receive one of the new license plates.

Owners who renew registrations through the mail or through the Internet will get a new plate and registration sticker in the mail. The cost of vehicle registration will not change.

The state identified those plates in need of replacing based on issue dates and sequence numbers, according to the Division of Motor Vehicles. The state legislature in its 2006 session allowed the DMV to receive \$1.2 million for the license plate replacement project.

In an effort to reduce waste, the DMV is asking motorists to recycle their old license plates after they receive the new ones. All DMV offices will collect old plates to be recycled.

The Wilson DMV office, located at 4000 Ward Blvd., hasn't yet received the new plates but is prepared for the transition.

"We haven't even gotten a memo about the switch yet, but I'm sure we'll have a smooth transition. We'll have them on hand and ready to go," said Cindy Stelck, manager of the local DMV.

Drivers also have 10 more specialized license plates they can select this year. North Carolina motorists now have more than 100 specialized license plates from which they may choose, if they're willing to pay an additional fee â€" from \$10 to \$30 â€" each year.

The new specialized plates include Gardner Webb University, Elon University, Lenoir Rhyne College, Purdue University, the University of Florida, In God We Trust, Retired Law Enforcement Officers, Share the Road, Watermelon and Scuba Diving.

Those 10 new plates join nearly 150 other specialized plates that are available.

The state legislature approved the 10 most recent specialized plates in 2006 session. Groups and organizations can apply to start a new specialized plate design, and if they are authorized, they must sell at least 300 of the plates before the state will create them.