

Importing a Car to the U.S.? Not so Fast...



By [Elizabeth M. Klarin](#)

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Many clients who obtain work authorization or have plans to enter as visitors for long periods of time have questions about what they can and can't bring into the U.S. One thing they usually don't think about is the vehicle they plan to enter in. So [here's the rule](#), straight from the horse's mouth (the horse being U.S. Customs and Border Protection):

"Nonresidents may import a vehicle duty-free for personal use up to (1) one year if the vehicle is imported in conjunction with the owner's arrival. Vehicles imported under this provision that do not conform to U.S. safety and emission standards must be exported within one year and may not be sold in the U.S. There is no exemption or extension of the export requirements."

In short, vehicles imported by nonresidents for personal use not exceeding one year don't need to conform to emissions or safety requirements. However, they may still require Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Transportation (DOT) declarations. Specific to travelers from the Great White North, motorists from Canada are permitted to tour in the U.S. without U.S. license plates or U.S. driver's permits as well.

Conveniently, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has "[Know Before You Go](#)" and "[For International Visitors](#)" pages:

that are just a click away.

If you do need to import your vehicle for longer-term use, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also has [specific emissions regulations and requirements](#) for importing motor vehicles, motor vehicle engines, heavy-duty on-highway engines, recreational vehicles (dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles, offroad utility vehicles, and snowmobiles), and nonroad engines (generators, watercraft, and lawn and garden equipment) to the U.S. If you are required to [import your vehicle from Canada](#) or another country, be aware that importers need to verify whether the vehicle they are importing has an emission control system that is or is not identical to a U.S. certified version, and that a compliance label identifying them as conforming to EPA requirements may be required.

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