

Retiree Corner:

Changing Vehicle Registration from SOFA to Non-SOFA

By Jack Terwiel

Military Retiree Assistance Office

Whether you achieve fully-retired status directly from active duty, or you transition via a civil service or contractor job, fully retiring changes the status of your vehicle. You lose SOFA status and your vehicle loses SOFA status, too.

For non-SOFA registration, start with the question of where the car was made. If it's a Korean car, even one brought in from the U.S. or other country, the mandatory emissions inspection should be a relatively easy process, or waived, and tax is low. If it's a foreign made car brought in tax-free, then you face several obstacles to register it. First, you would be liable for import tax on the car, the tax that wasn't paid when it came in tax-free to Korea. Tax rate depends on the age of the car. Newer cars are taxed at a higher rate. Second, you would be required to have an emissions test done on the car. There is no telling how much this would cost, but older cars require more repairs to comply. Failing to comply with this inspection would prevent you from registering the car and you have three options: sell the car to someone with SOFA status; ship the car back to where it came from; or junk the car.

Then you'll need a Korean driver's license. You have a choice of surrendering your stateside license and taking only a written test, or keeping your stateside license and taking the full testing regime of written and road tests. You can get your stateside license back later by presenting a valid airline ticket with destination outside Korea. After that, a vehicle inspection at a Korean facility and valid insurance will get you a USFK decal good for entry to any U.S. military installation in Korea.