

How to fill out VT-021 — Death Informational Bulletin and Surviving Spouse Statement

Vermont · written against VT-021 (05/2018), issued under 23 V.S.A. s. 2023(e) for the surviving spouse exception and s. 3816 for vessels, snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles; the statement is made under penalties of 23 V.S.A. s. 202, s. 203 and s. 3829(a)(4)

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Two pages that decide who is allowed to sign the assignment block on a dead owner's certificate. The first is a decision table - four routes through an estate, each with its own list of documents - and the second carries the exception that moves up to two vehicles to a surviving spouse for no fee and no tax, with the statement that claims it printed at the foot. It is a bulletin rather than an application, which is why it is so often missed: nobody searches the forms index for a bulletin, and this is where the answer is.

This sheet is not the form. Download the blank VT-021 from the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles, Agency of Transportation at https://dmv.vermont.gov/sites/dmv/files/documents/VT-021-Deceased_Owner.pdf — always take the current revision from the agency rather than a copy. Print this and keep it beside you while you complete theirs.

Every line, in the order you meet it

1	YOU	Read the legend on the certificate first	TEN ENT, JTEN, TEN COM, PTNRS, TOD, or nothing printed at all. Watch out: Everything on page one branches from that one abbreviation, and the difference between two of them is a death certificate against a letter from a probate judge.
2	YOU	Route 1 or 2: get a copy of the death certificate	For tenants by the entirety, the copy has to identify the surviving spouse. Watch out: Vermont town clerks issue certified copies of death certificates for deaths recorded in the town. Order two while you are there; the buyer's application keeps one.
3	YOU	Route 3: the TOD certificate	A copy of the death certificate and the original title with the Release of Liens section completed if a lienholder is printed on it. Watch out: The named beneficiary is now the owner and signs as the seller. Nothing they signed before the death has any effect.
4	YOU	Route 4: work out which of the four sub-routes you are on	Intestate or a will, probate or no probate. Four combinations, four different letters. Watch out: The letter has to name the person who has the rights of ownership to the vehicle. A letter that merely confirms a death is not the letter the department is asking for.
5	YOU	Section 1 on the back of the title	Completed by the administrator or the executor, with any other owners, assigning the vehicle to the new owner. Watch out: It is signed in the name of the estate's officer, not in the deceased's name. Signing a dead person's name into an assignment is a false statement, not a shortcut.
6	YOU	Surviving spouse: check the two conditions before the statement	No more than two vehicles, and nobody other than the deceased and the spouse on the title. Watch out: The cap is per person, not per estate, and the third vehicle simply reverts to the ordinary fees and tax. It is not a refusal.
7	YOU	The Surviving Spouse Statement	Your name, the deceased's name, one of the two boxes ticked, and your signature and date. Watch out: Tick the limb that is actually true. The second limb - a will that does not dispose of the vehicle to anyone other than you - is the one people miss because they assume any will closes the exception.
8	YOU	Then the registration application	A VD-119 for a new owner who is not already a registered owner, or where the registration has expired. Watch out: Under the exception no fee is assessed on up to two vehicles and the transaction is exempt from purchase and use tax, which is worth knowing before somebody pays it at the counter.

What gets this one rejected

- A letter from a solicitor in another state with nothing to show they are a solicitor. The bulletin asks for additional proof that an out-of-state authority is a member of the Bar or a court official.
- A third vehicle claimed under the exception. The cap is two motor vehicles, and the third is charged the full title and registration fees with purchase and use tax on top.
- The exception claimed on a title with a third name on it. It does not apply if the vehicle is titled in the name of anyone other than the deceased and the surviving spouse.
- A death certificate where a court officer's letter is required. Routes 1, 2 and 3 run on a death certificate; route 4 does not, and no amount of certified copies will substitute for the letter.
- A certificate assigned by an executor before the Probate Court's proof of appointment exists. Under the will-with-probate route the letter comes first and the assignment second.
- The surviving spouse statement completed where the exception is not being claimed. The line under the signature says it is only required if the vehicle is being registered under the exception.

☐ Amber is what you write ☐ Grey is a block somebody else completes The completed example follows overleaf.

Read off VT-021 (05/2018) and the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles, Agency of Transportation's own pages, current as of 2026-08-24. Plain-language help with a form, not legal advice — where this and the agency differ, the agency governs.

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Department of Motor Vehicles
Agency of Transportation

Death Informational Bulletin

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Requirements to Register/Re-Title Vehicle, Vessel, Snowmobile or All-Terrain Vehicle When Owner is Deceased

Definitions

- **Registered / Titled Owner** - Individual(s) shown as Owner(s) on the Title and/or Registration Certificate.
- **Intestate** - Died without a will.
- **No Probate** - The estate will not be the subject of Probate Court proceedings.
- **Probate** - The estate is the subject of Probate Court proceedings.
- **Officer Of The Court** - An attorney or an official court officer such as Court Clerk or Probate Judge.
- **Vehicle** - For the purposes of this form, the word "vehicle" will mean a motor vehicle, vessel, ATV, or snowmobile.

The following documents are required to sell or assign the vehicle, vessel, snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle based upon the Rights of Survivorship:

1) Jointly titled to *Tenants By The Entirety* (spouses):

- A copy of the Death Certificate identifying the surviving spouse.

2) Jointly titled and title states ownership to be *Joint Tenants* or *Partners*:

- A copy of the Death Certificate.

3) Titled to deceased only & ownership states *Transfer on Death "TOD"* (excludes vessel, snowmobile or ATV):

- A copy of the Death Certificate.
- Original title with "Release of Liens" section completed by the lienholder, if applicable.

4) Titled to deceased only or jointly with persons other than spouse and ownership states *Tenants in Common* or nature of ownership not stated on title:

INTESTATE - NO PROBATE

- A copy of the Death Certificate.
- A letter from an officer of the court stating that the deceased died intestate, there is no estate to be probated or the estate need not be probated, and names the person who has the rights of ownership to the vehicle. If the officer of the court is from out-of-state, additional proof is required that the authority is a member of the Bar or a Court Official.
- Original title properly assigned with "Release of Liens" section completed by the lienholder, if applicable.

INTESTATE - PROBATE

- A letter from the Probate Judge naming the Administrator of the estate.
- Original title properly assigned with the "Release of Liens" section completed by the lienholder, if applicable, and Section 1 completed by the Administrator and other owner(s), if they exist, assigning the vehicle to the new owner(s).

WILL - NO PROBATE

- A copy of the Death Certificate.
- A letter from the officer of the court stating the deceased died leaving a will that was not probated and naming the person with rights of ownership to the vehicle. If the officer of the court is from out-of-state, additional proof is required that the authority is a member of the Bar or a Court Official.
- Original title properly assigned, with "Release of Liens" section completed by the lienholder, if applicable.

WILL - PROBATE

- A letter from Probate Court showing proof of appointment of Executor of the will.
- Original title properly assigned with "Release of Liens" section completed by the lienholder, if applicable, and Section 1 completed by the Executor and other owner(s), if they exist, assigning the vehicle to the new owner(s).

Re-Registering the Vehicle/Vessel, Snowmobile or All-Terrain Vehicle

1. The deceased person's name may be removed from the registration and title any time during the registration year, if specifically requested by a titled **and** registered owner. Names on the registration and title must be the same; any changes to the names on the registration and/or title must be submitted at the same time.
2. If the new owner(s) are not currently registered owner(s), or if the registration has expired, the vehicle must be re-registered. Completed Vermont Registration, Tax and Title Application (VD-119) or Vermont Snowmobile Registration Application (VD-038) or Vermont Motorboat Registration Application (VD-037) must be submitted along with the appropriate fees.
3. If vehicle is being registered by surviving spouse see "SURVIVING SPOUSE EXCEPTION" below.

~ SURVIVING SPOUSE EXCEPTION ~

23 V.S.A. § 2023 and §3816. Transfer of interest in Vehicle, vessel, snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle.

1. **This exception applies to a maximum of two vehicles** (no limit on vessel, snowmobile or all-terrain vehicles).
If there is a third (or subsequent) vehicle involved, the new owner will be required to pay the full fees for the title and registration, and payment of Purchase and Use Tax may apply.
2. **This exception doesn't apply if the motor vehicle is titled in the name of one or more persons other than the deceased and the surviving spouse.**

The surviving spouse may have the vehicle registration/title transferred to his/her name if:

- the deceased spouse died intestate, or
- the person's will or other testamentary document does not specifically address disposition of motor vehicles.

23 V.S.A. §2023 - no fees are due for a maximum of two vehicles.

23 V.S.A. §3816 - no fees are due for an unlimited number of vessels, snowmobiles, or all-terrain vehicles.

Surviving spouse statement (below) must be completed in order to qualify for transfer at no fee.

Surviving Spouse Statement

I, Rosalie B. Thibault hereby certify that Lucien A. Thibault died
Name of surviving spouse Name of deceased

☐ without leaving a will, or

☐ leaving a will that does not dispose of the vehicle to any person other than the survivor.

I further certify that I was the legal spouse to the above named person at the time of his/her death.

I understand that this declaration is made under the penalties of 23 V.S.A. § 202, §203 and § 3829(a) 4.

Rosalie Thibault

Signature

08/12/2026

Date

Surviving Spouse Statement is only required if the vehicle is being registered under above referenced "exception"