

## LEGALITIES OF GOLF CART OPERATION ON THE ROADWAY

The Kingsport Police Department routinely receives citizen inquiries regarding the legalities of operating golf carts on the roadway. There has been a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding on this subject, so some education and clarification is certainly in order.

Tennessee state law recognizes three categories of vehicles related to this issue:

- 1) **Traditional Golf Cart** which is defined as a motor vehicle that is designed and manufactured for operation on a golf course for sporting or recreational purposes that is not capable of exceeding speeds of twenty miles per hour (20 mph)
- 2) **Low Speed Vehicle** which is defined as any four-wheeled electric vehicle (excluding traditional golf carts), whose top speed is greater than 20 miles per hour (20 mph) but not greater than twenty-five miles per hour (25 mph)
- 3) **Medium Speed Vehicle** which is defined as any four-wheeled electric or gasoline-powered vehicle (excluding traditional golf carts), whose top speed is greater than thirty miles per hour (30 mph) but not greater than thirty-five miles per hour (35 mph)

Per Tennessee state law, a vehicle meeting the above definition of a “traditional golf cart” **IS NOT** street legal and may not be titled and registered for on-road use, **UNLESS** it has been modified to meet all of the low or medium speed vehicle requirements in Tennessee state law and related federal safety standards.

A golf cart that has been designed and manufactured for on-road use, or is modified to meet all of the low or medium speed vehicle requirements and federal safety standards does not meet the above legal definition of a “traditional golf cart.” Since this vehicle is legally not a “traditional golf cart,” it may be legally registered as a low or medium speed vehicle if all necessary requirements are met.

To register a low or medium speed vehicle, designed and manufactured for on-road use, applicants should provide to their local county clerk’s office a copy of the vehicle’s MSO (manufacturer’s statement of origin), as proof that the vehicle meets all statutory requirements and safety standards, along with the traditional documentation required for vehicle registration.

Individuals modifying a traditional golf cart to meet low or medium speed vehicle requirements must submit a low or medium speed vehicle affidavit (see links below) that certifies that the vehicle has been sufficiently modified to meet the necessary legal requirements. The affidavit must be submitted with the registration application as a condition of registration.

### ***Low Speed Vehicle Affidavit***

<https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/revenue/documents/forms/titlereg/f1314301F11-in.pdf>

### ***Medium Speed Vehicle Affidavit***

<https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/revenue/documents/forms/titlereg/f1319801F11-in.pdf>

## **GOLF CARTS (CONTINUED)**

In order to be street legal, a low or medium speed vehicle must meet the following requirements:

- Must have headlamps
- Must have stop lamps
- Must have front and rear turn signals
- Must have tail lamps
- Must have reflex reflectors (one on each side near the rear and one on the rear)
- Must have a parking brake
- Must have one exterior mirror on the driver side and one additional mirror (either on the passenger side or in the interior)
- Must have a windshield that conforms to the federal motor vehicle safety standard on glazing materials
- Must have seat belts (type 1 or 2) located at each seating position
- Must have a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN)
- Must be registered and have license plate displayed
- Must be insured with proof of insurance available
- Must be operated by a licensed driver with a valid Class D driver license in their possession

A street legal low speed vehicle may be operated on streets where the posted speed limit is thirty-five miles per hour (35 mph) or less. A street legal medium speed vehicle may be operated on streets where the posted speed limit is forty miles per hour (40 mph) or less. While low and medium speed vehicle may not be driven on streets that exceed the respective 35 and 40 mph limits, they may cross such streets, but only at intersections. Drivers of all street legal low and medium speed vehicles must obey all traffic laws and rules of the road.

Also, pursuant to City of Kingsport Municipal Ordinance, vehicles (to include traditional golf carts as well as low and medium speed vehicles) **MAY NOT** be operated on a sidewalk.

Finally, Tennessee D.U.I. laws apply to any motor vehicle to include traditional golf carts as well as low and medium speed vehicles.

It is important to note than anyone who chooses to ignore the above regulations concerning traditional golf carts and low and medium speed vehicles may be subject to significant criminal penalties and civil liabilities.

### References:

- Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) 55-1-103, 55-1-122, 55-1-123, 55-4-111, 55-8-101, 55-8-191, 55-10-401, and 55-50-102
- City of Kingsport Municipal Ordinance 98-81
- Tennessee Department of Revenue [www.TN.gov/Revenue](http://www.TN.gov/Revenue)
- Federal Safety Standards 49 CFR 565, 571.205, and 571.500