

Chain Requirement Levels

During the winter months, motorists may encounter traction chain controls in the mountain areas within California. When chain controls are established, signs will be posted along the road indicating the type of requirement. There are **Three Levels of Chain Requirements in California**:

- **Requirement 1 (R-1):** Chains are required on all vehicles except passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks under 6,000 pounds gross weight and equipped with snow tires on at least two drive wheels. Chains must be carried by vehicles using snow tires. All vehicles towing trailers must have chains on one drive axle. Trailers with brakes must have chains on at least one axle.
- **Requirement 2 (R2):** Chains or traction devices are required on all vehicles except four-wheel/all-wheel drive vehicles with snow-tread tires on all four wheels.
NOTE: (Four-wheel/all-wheel drive vehicles must carry traction devices in chain control areas.)
- **Requirement 3 (R3):** Chains or traction devices are required on all vehicles, no exceptions.

Truckers, see our [Truck Chain Requirements page](#).

R-1 and R-2 are the most common conditions. A highway will often be closed before an R-3 condition is imposed. Some local areas may use variations of these designations. You must follow the directions on the signs posted for chain controls or any instructions given by Caltrans or CHP personnel at chain control check points, even if these are at variance with broadcast road condition reports or information contained herein.

1 Snow-tread Tires: The California Vehicle Code, Section 558 defines a snow-tread tire as follows, "A 'Snow-tread tire' is a tire which has a relatively deep and aggressive tread pattern compared with conventional passenger tread pattern". Snow-tread tires can be identified by examining the sidewall of the tire where the letters MS, M/S, M+S or the words MUD AND SNOW have been stamped into the sidewall.

2 Tire Traction Devices: The California Vehicle Code, Section 605 defines tire traction devices as follows: "Tire Traction Devices are devices or mechanisms having a composition and design capable of improving vehicle traction, braking and cornering ability upon snow or ice-covered surfaces. Tire traction devices shall be constructed and assembled to provide sufficient structural integrity and to prevent accidental detachment from vehicles. Tire traction devices shall, at the time of manufacture or final assembly, bear a permanent impression indicating the name, initials or trademark of the assembling company or primary manufacturer, and the country in which the devices were manufactured or assembled in final form."

The full, searchable version of the California Vehicle Code is available at: [Leginfo](#), the website for California Legislative Information.

Please note: The California Department Of Transportation (Caltrans) reserves the right to prevent any vehicle from entering a chain control area when it is determined the vehicle will experience difficulty in safely traveling the area.

Chain Requirements

Revised 10/16



Vehicles are permitted in chain control areas when equipped with link-type chains or Alternative Traction Devices (ATD). Examples of ATDs include: cable chains, textile snow chains, wheel hub attached chains, and automatic tire chains. Tire traction devices are defined in the California Vehicle Code (CVC) Section 605. When the term "chains" is used here, it means any "tire traction device" which meets the requirements of (VC) Section 605.

Vehicles with cable chains as well as other less conventional devices are legal in California. However, these may be restricted at times due to local conditions.

Minimum legal tread depth for mud and snow tires is 6/32 of an inch. Caltrans and the [California Highway Patrol \(CHP\)](#) reserve the right to prohibit any vehicle from entering a chain control area when it is determined that the traction devices do not meet the requirements of (CVC) Section 605.

LEGEND

- Driving axle
- Non-driving axle
- Wheel with chains or ATD
- Wheel with no chains or ATD
- Drive axle must be chained.
- Chains on trailers may be staggered front and back.
- Caltrans and CHP may require chains on all drive wheels if conditions warrant.
- Both axes must be chained (four wheels with chains or ATD).
- Chains required on inside dual (if possible).



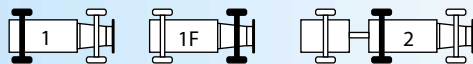
NOTES

- All vehicles, including four-wheel or all-wheel drive vehicles must carry chains upon entering a chain control area.
- All vehicles, including four-wheel or all-wheel drive vehicles, that are towing trailers must have chains on one drive axle.
- Trailers with brakes must have chains on one axle.
- Front-wheel drive vehicles must have chains on front (drive) axle.
- On any semi-trailer, only one set of chains is required regardless of number of axles.
- Chains are not required on tag axle.
- Trucks or tractors equipped with super singles, chains are required on all drive wheels.



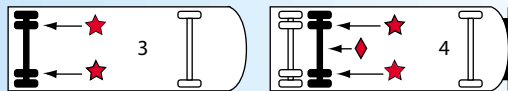
Acceptable on either axle of semi-trailers.

AUTOS/PICKUPS



BUSES/RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

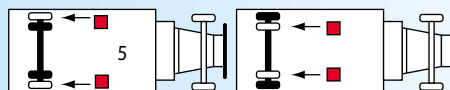
(Articulated buses must also chain outside wheels of last axle.)



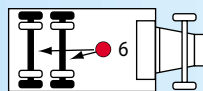
Type 2

Type 3

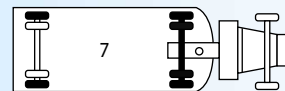
TRUCKS



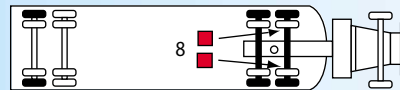
Truck Type 2



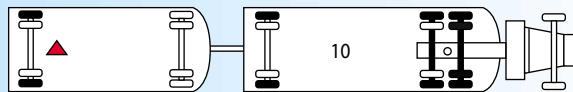
Truck Type 3



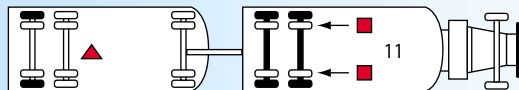
Tractor and Semi-trailer Single Dr.



Tractor and Semi-trailer Type 3-S-2

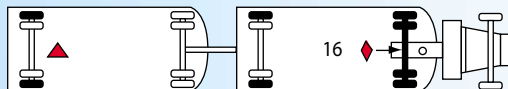


Tractor, Semi-trailer, and Trailer Type 3-S-1-T-2



Truck and Trailer Type 3-T-3 or 3-T-2

The following truck may be restricted when chains are required:



Tractor, Semi-trailer, and Trailer Type 2-S-1-T-2