

No more legal heat on big fire rig

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Vacaville Fire Department Engineer Jose Bolanos steps around the tractor-drawn aerial ladder fire truck at Station 71 on Wednesday. The truck came under scrutiny due to its weight, and was taken out of service until officials could be sure it met code. (Ryan Chalk/The Reporter)

The Vacaville Fire Department has been given clearance to use its unique Tiller Truck, a \$750,000 investment that had been pulled from service since October.

The tractor-drawn aerial ladder vehicle was received by the department in December of 2006, but came under scrutiny earlier in the year after questions were raised about its weight and how it fit into the California Code of Regulations.

Because the truck has a rear steering mechanism - in addition to conventional front-end steering - confusion arose when applying axle-specific regulations. The ambiguity of exactly what category the truck fit into created several questions and eventually led to Vacaville Fire Chief Brian Preciado pulling it from service until he got a concrete answer.

That all changed when the city of Vacaville recently received a letter of exemption from the California Department of Transportation allowing use of the vehicle until December of 2008, or until the laws are changed.

Upon hearing of the exemption, Vacaville Division Chief Frank Drayton drove to Sacramento, applied for and received the permit that now allows the use of the truck in Vacaville and the state of California.

"We were confident that Caltrans would give us this exemption," Preciado said in a prepared statement. "There was never a question in our minds that our truck was perfectly safe."