
Vehicle Towing and Release

510.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides the procedures for towing a vehicle by or at the direction of the Elk Grove Police Department. Nothing in this policy shall require the Department to tow a vehicle.

510.2 STORAGE AND IMPOUNDS

When circumstances permit, for example when towing a vehicle for parking or registration violations, the handling employee should, prior to having the vehicle towed, make a good faith effort to notify the owner of the vehicle that it is subject to removal. This may be accomplished by personal contact, telephone or by leaving a notice attached to the vehicle at least 24 hours prior to removal. If a vehicle presents a hazard, such as being abandoned on the roadway, it may be towed immediately.

The responsibilities of those employees towing, storing or impounding a vehicle are listed below.

510.2.1 VEHICLE STORAGE REPORT

Department members requesting towing, storage, or impound of a vehicle shall complete a CHP Form 180 and accurately record the mileage and a description of property within the vehicle (Vehicle Code § 22850). A copy of the storage report should be given to the tow truck operator, and the original shall be submitted to the Records Bureau as soon as practicable after the vehicle is stored.

510.2.2 REMOVAL FROM TRAFFIC COLLISION SCENES

When a vehicle has been involved in a traffic collision and must be removed from the scene, the officer shall have the driver select a towing company, if possible, and shall relay the request for the specified towing company to the dispatcher. When there is no preferred company requested, a company will be selected from the rotational list of towing companies in the Dispatch Center.

If the owner is incapacitated, or for any reason it is necessary for the Department to assume responsibility for a vehicle involved in a collision, the officer shall request the dispatcher to call for a tow from the Department's rotational tow list. The officer will then store the vehicle using a CHP Form 180.

510.2.3 STORAGE AT ARREST SCENES

Whenever a person in charge or in control of a vehicle is arrested, it is the policy of this department to provide reasonable safekeeping by storing the arrestee's vehicle subject to the exceptions described below. The vehicle, however, shall be stored whenever it is needed for the furtherance of the investigation or prosecution of the case, or when the community caretaker doctrine would reasonably suggest that the vehicle should be stored (e.g., traffic hazard, high crime area).

The following are examples of situations where consideration should be given to leaving a vehicle at the scene in lieu of storing, provided the vehicle can be lawfully parked and left in a reasonably secured and safe condition:

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- Traffic related warrant arrest.
- Situations where the vehicle was not used to further the offense for which the driver was arrested.
- Whenever the licensed owner of the vehicle is present, willing, and able to take control of any vehicle not involved in criminal activity.
- Whenever the vehicle otherwise does not need to be stored and the owner requests that it be left at the scene. In such cases the owner shall be informed that the Department will not be responsible for theft or damages.

510.2.4 IMPOUNDMENT AT SOBRIETY CHECKPOINTS

Whenever a driver is stopped at a sobriety checkpoint and the only violation is that the operator is driving without a valid driver's license, the officer shall make a reasonable attempt to identify the registered owner of the vehicle (Vehicle Code § 2814.2). The officer shall release the vehicle to the registered owner if the person is a licensed driver, or to another licensed driver authorized by the registered owner, provided the vehicle is claimed prior to the conclusion of the checkpoint operation.

If the vehicle is released at the checkpoint, the officer shall list on his/her copy of the Notice to Appear the name and driver's license number of the person to whom the vehicle is released.

When a vehicle cannot be released at the checkpoint, it shall be towed (Vehicle Code § 22651(p)). When a vehicle is removed at the checkpoint, it shall be released during the normal business hours of the storage facility to the registered owner or his/her agent upon presentation of a valid driver's license and current vehicle registration.

510.2.5 DRIVING A NON-CITY VEHICLE

Vehicles which have been towed by or at the direction of the Department should not be driven by police personnel unless it is necessary to move a vehicle a short distance to eliminate a hazard, prevent the obstruction of a fire hydrant or to comply with posted signs.

510.2.6 DISPATCHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon receiving a request for towing, the dispatcher shall promptly telephone the specified authorized towing service. The officer shall be advised when the request has been made and the towing service has been dispatched.

When there is no preferred company requested, the dispatcher shall call the next firm in rotation from the list of approved towing companies and shall make appropriate entries on that form to ensure the following firm is called on the next request.

510.2.7 RECORDS BUREAU RESPONSIBILITY

Records personnel shall promptly enter pertinent data from the completed storage form (CHP Form 180) into the Stolen Vehicle System and return the form to the Watch Commander for approval (Vehicle Code § 22651.5(b); Vehicle Code § 22851.3(b); Vehicle Code § 22854.5).

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Approved storage forms shall be promptly placed into the auto-file so that they are immediately available for release or review should inquiries be made.

Within 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays, of the storage of any such vehicle it shall be the responsibility of the Records Bureau to determine the names and addresses of any individuals having an interest in the vehicle through DMV or CLETS computers. Notice shall be sent to all such individuals by mail as applicable and as provided in Vehicle Code § 22851.3(d), Vehicle Code § 22852(a), and Vehicle Code § 14602.6(a)(2). The notice shall include the following (Vehicle Code § 22852(b)):

- (a) The name, address, and telephone number of this Department
- (b) The location of the place of storage and description of the vehicle, which shall include, if available, the name or make, the manufacturer, the license plate number, and the mileage
- (c) The authority and purpose for the removal of the vehicle
- (d) A statement that, in order to receive their post-storage hearing, the owners, or their agents, shall request the hearing in person, in writing, or by telephone within 10 days of the date appearing on the notice

510.3 TOWING SERVICES

The City of City of Elk Grove periodically selects a firm to act as the official tow service and awards a contract to that firm. This firm will be used in the following situations:

- (a) When it is necessary to safeguard a vehicle due to the inability of the owner or operator to take the required action.
- (b) When a vehicle is being held as evidence in connection with an investigation.
- (c) When it is otherwise necessary to store a motor vehicle. This would include situations involving the recovery of stolen or abandoned vehicles, and the removal of vehicles obstructing traffic in violation of state or local regulations.

510.3.1 "NO PREFERENCE" OR "ROTATION" TOW SERVICES

The Police Department will assist citizens by calling any towing company desired. If the citizen has no preference and requests that an officer call a towing company, one of the rotational tow companies shall be called in rotation.

All officers are specifically prohibited from directly or indirectly soliciting for or recommending any garage or tow service.

510.4 VEHICLE INVENTORY

All property in a stored or impounded vehicle shall be inventoried and listed on the vehicle storage form. This includes the trunk and any compartments or containers, even if closed and/or locked. Department employees conducting inventory searches should be as thorough and accurate as practical in preparing an itemized inventory. These inventory procedures are for the purpose of protecting an owner's property while in police custody, to provide for the safety of officers, and to protect the Department against fraudulent claims of lost, stolen, or damaged property.

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510.5 SECURITY OF VEHICLES AND PROPERTY

Unless it would cause an unreasonable delay in the completion of a vehicle impound/storage or create an issue of officer safety, officers should make reasonable accommodations to permit a driver/owner to retrieve small items of value or personal need (e.g., cash, jewelry, cell phone, prescriptions) that are not considered evidence or contraband.

If a search of a vehicle leaves the vehicle or any property contained therein vulnerable to unauthorized entry, theft, or damage, personnel conducting the search shall take such steps as are reasonably necessary to secure and/or preserve the vehicle or property from such hazards.

510.6 RELEASE OF VEHICLE

The Department will maintain a listed, 24-hour telephone number to provide information regarding impoundment of vehicles and the right of the registered owner to request a storage hearing. Releases for towed vehicles will be made available during regular, non-emergency business hours (Vehicle Code § 14602.6).

- (a) Vehicles removed pursuant to Vehicle Code § 22850 shall be released after proof of current registration is provided by the owner or the person in control of the vehicle and after all applicable fees are paid (Vehicle Code § 22850.3; Vehicle Code § 22850.5).
- (b) Vehicles removed that require payment of parking fines or proof of valid driver's license shall only be released upon presentation of proof of compliance, proof of payment, completion of affidavit, and payment of applicable fees related to the removal (Vehicle Code § 22651 et seq., Vehicle Code § 22652 et seq., Vehicle Code § 22850.3; Vehicle Code § 22850.5).
- (c) A vehicle removed pursuant to Vehicle Code § 14602.6(a) shall be released to the registered owner or his/her agent with proof of current registration, proof of a valid driver's license, and applicable fees paid prior to the end of the 30-day impoundment period under any of the following circumstances:
 - 1. The vehicle was stolen.
 - 2. If the driver reinstates his/her driver's license or acquires a license and provides proof of proper insurance.
 - 3. Any other circumstance as set forth in Vehicle Code § 14602.6.
 - 4. When there is no remaining community caretaking need to continue impound of the vehicle or the continued impound would not otherwise comply with the Fourth Amendment.
- (d) An autonomous vehicle removed under authority of Vehicle Code § 22651(o)(1)(D) shall be released to the registered owner or person in control of the autonomous vehicle if the requirements of Vehicle Code § 22651(o)(3)(B) are met.

Personnel whose duties include releasing towed vehicles should consult the Vehicle Code under which the vehicle was towed or impounded for any specific requirements prior to release.

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Employees who suspect that a vehicle was impounded in error should promptly advise a supervisor. Supervisors should approve, when appropriate, the release of the vehicle without requiring the registered owner or his/her agent to request a hearing, as described in the Vehicle Impound Hearings Policy.

510.7 TOWING FOR EXPIRED REGISTRATION

Prior to an employee removing a vehicle that is found to have expired registration for more than six months, the employee shall verify that no current registration exists with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). If current registration exists with the DMV, the vehicle shall not be removed (Vehicle Code § 22651(o)(1)(A)).

510.8 IMPOUND STORAGE FOR EVIDENCE

Any vehicle that is impounded for investigative purposes shall be done by the authorized tow operator. The officer impounding the vehicle shall make arrangements that evidence is preserved and the chain of custody is followed. It is preferable to store these vehicles in an inside storage area.

The Records Bureau shall notify the appropriate investigative unit (traffic or detective bureau) of the evidence impound.

The vehicle shall be released from the evidence impound as soon as practical, but only after all viable evidence has been obtained.

510.9 NEIGHBORHOOD PARKED VEHICLE TOWS

This policy describes how personnel should proceed when considering towing a vehicle parked in a neighborhood pursuant to parking complaints, self-initiated activity or enforcement actions. A balanced, reasonable protocol prevents frequent complaints, poor customer service and damaged community relations.

510.9.1 FIELD PERSONNEL RESPONSIBILITIES

Officers and Community Services Officers should balance the needs of the community with the letter of the law. Reasonable efforts should be made to warn citizens of potential violations which justify towing and storing vehicles PRIOR TO towing the vehicle.

510.9.2 REASONABLE PROTOCOL

When employees respond to complaints of abandoned vehicles, vehicles parked without movement for over 72 hours, unregistered vehicles or illegally parked vehicles, they shall complete one or more of the following steps intended to give adequate notice before towing the vehicle:

- Contact the registered owner if the registered owner's address is within the immediate vicinity of the parked vehicle. CSO's are not required to make personal contact if confrontation seems likely.

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- If contemplating a tow for registration expired over six months, effort should be taken to determine if any application is in process and consider this application when deciding to tow.
- Apply an appropriately completed "72 Hour" notice to the vehicle.
- Issue an appropriate parking citation to the vehicle.

Any of these steps taken shall be noted in a CAD event which identifies the vehicle and the action(s) taken. Steps should be taken to show evidence that a vehicle has not been moved if a 72 hour violation is alleged (e.g., chalk marks, photographs, or other measures). Any history of the above actions with the same vehicle by different personnel will satisfy this directive.

510.9.3 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Field Supervisors may override this directive if mitigating circumstances justify a stronger response.