

Vehicle Towing and Release

502.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides the procedures for towing a vehicle by or at the direction of the California Department of State Hospitals (DSH). Nothing in this policy shall require DSH to tow a vehicle.

502.2 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.

502.2.1 VEHICLE STORAGE REPORT

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

502.2.2 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 Communication Center. When

there is no preferred company requested, a company will be selected from the rotational list of towing companies in the Communications Center.

If the owner is incapacitated, or for any reason it is necessary for OPS to assume responsibility for a vehicle involved in a collision, the officer shall request the Communication Center to call the official towing garage for OPS. The officer will then store the vehicle using a CHP Form 180.

502.2.3 STORAGE AT ARREST SCENES

Whenever a person in charge or in control of a vehicle is arrested, it is the policy of OPS 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:

- 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 DSH will not be responsible for theft or damages.

502.2.4 DRIVING A NON-STATE VEHICLE

Vehicles which have been towed by or at the direction of OPS should not be driven by hospital employees 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.

502.2.5 COMMUNICATION OPERATOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon receiving a request for towing, the communication operator 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 communication operator 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.

502.2.6 RECORDS RESPONSIBILITY

The Communication Center 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. (Veh. Code, § 22651.5(b); Veh. Code, § 22851.3(b); Veh. Code, § 22854.5.)

Approved storage forms shall be maintained 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 Records 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 first-class mail. (Veh. Code, § 22851.3(d); Veh. Code, § 22852(a); Veh. Code, § 14602.6(a)(2).) The notice shall include the following (Veh. Code, § 22852(b).):

- (a) The name, address, and telephone number of OPS.
- (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, writing, or by telephone within 10 days of the date appearing on the notice.

502.3 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. OPS 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 hospital custody, to provide for the safety of officers, and to protect DSH against fraudulent claims of lost, stolen, or damaged property.

502.4 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) which 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, employees conducting the search shall take such steps as are reasonably necessary to secure and/or preserve the vehicle or property from such hazards.

502.5 RELEASE OF VEHICLE

DSH 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 (Veh. Code § 14602.6).

- (a) Vehicles removed pursuant to Vehicle Code section 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 (Veh. Code § 22850.3; Veh. 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 (Veh. Code § 22651 et seq., Veh. Code § 22652 et seq., Veh. Code § 22850.3; Veh. 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:
 - (a) The vehicle was stolen.
 - (b) If the driver reinstates his/her driver's license or acquires a license and provides proof of proper insurance.
 - (c) Any other circumstance as set forth in Vehicle Code section 14602.6.
 - (d) 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.
 - (e) An autonomous vehicle removed under authority of Vehicle Code section 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 section 22651(o) (3)(B) are met.

Employees 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.

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.