

Vehicle Towing and Release

510.1 POLICY

The Vancouver Police Department authorizes officers to take custody of vehicles for evidence, forfeiture or impound and to conduct searches of the vehicles as allowed under applicable laws.

510.2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidance related to vehicle towing. Nothing in this policy shall require a member of this department to tow a vehicle. This policy will also provide guidance in the proper release of vehicles from police custody.

510.3 AUTHORIZATION TO TAKE CUSTODY OF A VEHICLE

A police officer may take custody of a vehicle, at his or her discretion, and provide for its prompt removal to a place of safety under any of the circumstances outlined in RCW 46.55.113 and otherwise by law. This includes impounding a vehicle from private property, if allowed by law.

Officers should consider reasonable alternatives to the impound. Officers do not have to exhaust all possible alternatives before impounding a vehicle. Reasonable alternatives include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Allowing the operator to retain custody of the vehicle, if the operator is not likely to continue to engage in unlawful conduct
- (b) Transferring custody of the vehicle to another person at the scene or someone who can respond in a reasonable period of time to take custody of the vehicle
- (c) Securing the vehicle where it was stopped, if the vehicle is parked legally and safely
- (d) Moving the vehicle to a safe and legal parking location
- (e) Asking the owner, manager, or employee of the parking lot or business if the vehicle can remain on their property
- (f) Contacting the registered and/or legal owner to move the vehicle in a reasonable period of time if the vehicle has been abandoned

If the vehicle is impounded, officers should document, in their report, any alternatives that were considered and why those alternatives were not reasonable under the circumstances.

510.4 EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of those Vancouver Police Department employees impounding, towing or moving a vehicle are as follows.

510.4.1 REMOVAL OF VEHICLE DISABLED IN A TRAFFIC COLLISION

When a vehicle has been involved in a traffic collision and must be removed from the scene, unless the operator of the vehicle arranges for the prompt removal of the vehicle, a company will be selected from the VPD rotational list of towing companies in Dispatch.

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510.4.2 DRIVING A NON-CITY VEHICLE TO AVOID A TOW

Vehicles may be driven by police personnel when necessary to move the vehicle a short distance to mitigate a hazard or prevent the obstruction of a fire hydrant in the event of a fire emergency.

510.4.3 RECORDS NOTIFICATION

Whenever a vehicle is towed under the authority of an officer, VPD Records Division shall be notified as soon as practicable before the end of their current work shift. Officers should notate the name and PSN of the Records employee notified into their related report.

510.4.4 RECORDS RESPONSIBILITIES

Whenever a recovered stolen vehicle is impounded by the Vancouver Police Department, VPD Records Division personnel will promptly attempt to notify the legal owner of the recovery. All notification attempts will be documented.

510.5 TOWING SERVICES FOR FORFEITURE AND EVIDENCE IMPOUND

The City of Vancouver 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 a vehicle is seized for forfeiture.
- (b) When a vehicle is being held as evidence in connection with an investigation and service of a search warrant.

510.5.1 ASSET FORFEITURE IMPOUND

If the case officer has reason to seize the vehicle per RCW for an asset/civil forfeiture, the officer will follow established Department procedures regarding asset forfeiture.

The vehicle will be taken to the VPD Evidence Facility and placed in the secured parking lot if there is room available. If there is not room, or the facility is not accessible, a supervisor will determine where the vehicle will be placed. All documents will be forwarded to the Logistics Unit Supervisor.

Every contact, attempted contact and event regarding this process will be documented in a police report. It is vital to include all dates, times, and names for documentation purposes.

510.5.2 EVIDENCE / SEARCH WARRANT IMPOUND/VEHICLE RELEASE

Vehicles believed to contain vital evidence shall be placed in a secured, designated evidence area while applying for a search warrant. The seized vehicle should be marked by the orange markers in evidence, unless marking the vehicle will interfere with the investigation or may destroy or damage evidence. The vehicle should be marked after the warrant has been served if there is no further risk of destruction of evidence or additional need to maintain the vehicle in the same condition it was in when it was seized. The vehicles should have the date and case number placed on the windshield. The vehicle will be processed as soon as reasonable. If the vehicle cannot be processed within the current work week, the case officer will notify their supervisor and advise of the reasons for the delay.

Once the vehicle is processed, the case officer will make a reasonable attempt to notify the owner and/or responsible party to have the vehicle released back to them. If the case officer does not

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hear from the owner or responsible party within 24 hours, the vehicle will be towed using the next available tow company from the rotational list. Once the tow form(s) are completed and a copy has been provided to the tow operator, the vehicle will be considered released from police custody.

Every contact, attempted contact and event regarding this process will be documented in the related police reports or CAD to include all dates, times, and names.

[See attachment: DM 25-0014 AMENDED Towing from precinct to Impound lot.pdf](#)

510.6 VEHICLE SEARCHES

Vehicles may be searched with a search warrant or valid exception.

If the search is of a vehicle under the control of a juvenile, the provisions of youth access to counsel under RCW 13.40.740 must be followed.

510.7 VEHICLE INVENTORY SEARCH

Any property located or identified as having an obvious high value may be submitted into the evidence system for safekeeping.

510.8 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 items of value or personal need (e.g. cash, jewelry, cell phone, prescriptions) which are not considered evidence or contraband.

Attachments

DM 25-0014 AMENDED Towing from precinct to Impound lot.pdf



City of Vancouver
Police Department

Troy Price
Chief of Police



Department Memorandum 25-0014

TO: All Personnel

FROM: Troy Price, Chief of Police PSN/1234 *to*

DATE: April 16, 2025

RE: **Towing from the Precinct to an Impound Lot**

Due a recent court decision, officers will now be required to make an attempt to contact the registered owner of a vehicle **and then wait at least 24 hours** before it is towed FROM a precinct TO an impound facility. This allows the owner the opportunity to retrieve their vehicle. Documentation of this contact attempt is required in either the corresponding police report or the CAD notes.

For background purposes: Recently a hit & run suspect's vehicle was towed to the precinct for a search warrant. Upon completion of the execution of the warrant, the vehicle was towed to an impound lot without the owner being notified. The registered owner of the vehicle challenged the fees for the tow to the impound lot. The judge ruled that the tow TO the precinct for the search warrant was appropriate and that the tow FROM the precinct to the impound lot was inappropriate without first contacting the registered owner to give them a reasonable amount of time to retrieve it. This ruling created a situation where the City of Vancouver will have to cover the expenses related to the impound tow and storage.