

# Abandoned Vehicles

**Index Code: 1910**

**Effective Date: 11/15/02 (Revised 09/15/12)**

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## **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this directive is to provide guidelines for handling abandoned vehicles, and vehicles that are illegally stopped, standing, parked, stolen, or otherwise in custody of the Office of the Sheriff.

## **II. Policy**

It is the policy of the Office of the Sheriff to investigate complaints of abandoned vehicles, and vehicles that are illegally stopped, standing, parked, or stolen, and have those vehicles removed or otherwise secured in accordance with current Maryland Motor Vehicle Laws.

## **III. Definition**

Under Maryland Motor Vehicle Law a motor vehicle is considered abandoned when it has remained illegally on public property for more than forty-eight (48) hours, or has remained on private property for more than forty-eight (48) hours without the consent of the owner, or for more than ten (10) days in a commercially operated garage.

For purposes of this directive a vehicle is also considered abandoned if it is illegally stopped, standing, parked, or stolen, and requires removal for investigative purposes or public safety.

## **IV. Public Property**

A. Deputies investigating complaints of abandoned vehicles on public property will:

1. Determine if the vehicle is stolen, wanted in connection with an official investigation, or presents a traffic hazard.
2. Attach an Unattended Vehicle Tag to the vehicle in a conspicuous location, indicating that the vehicle will be towed if not removed within forty-eight (48) hours.
3. Have the abandoned vehicle removed by the owner if available, or towed if the owner cannot be located or is otherwise unavailable. Unless presenting a traffic hazard, abandoned

vehicles should be towed during regular business hours (0800 hours to 1700 hours).

4. If an abandoned vehicle presents a traffic hazard it must be towed as soon as possible, but only after making an attempt to contact the current owner/operator and providing them with a reasonable opportunity to respond and remove the vehicle.

B. It is the responsibility of the Towed Vehicle Coordinator to track the status of all vehicles towed by the Office of the Sheriff, and abandoned vehicles removed after they have been tagged for forty-eight (48) hours if the deputy who tagged the vehicle is unavailable.

## **V. Private Property**

A. Deputies responding to complaints of abandoned vehicles on private property will:

1. Determine if the vehicle is stolen, wanted in connection with an official investigation, or is a traffic hazard.
2. Make reasonable efforts to contact the current owner/operator, advising them of the complaint.
3. Advise the property owner, or person in charge, to contact a tow company of their choice for removing the vehicle.

B. Deputies will not remove vehicles from private property unless there are exigent circumstances which meet supervisory approval.

## **VI. Owner Notification**

As soon as possible after towing an abandoned vehicle, the deputy responsible for towing the vehicle will make reasonable attempts to contact the owner advising them the location of the vehicle. Notification is considered made when the owner is contacted in person or by telephone. Notification is not considered made when notes are left on doors or messages left on answering machines. The results of such notification, or

lack thereof, will be documented in a supplement report.

In the event the owner cannot be located and/or notified, the Towed Vehicle Coordinator will notify the last known registered owner in accordance with current Maryland Vehicle law.

**VII. Abandoned Boats**

A. Boats abandoned on navigable waterways and along tidal shorelines should be referred to the Department of Natural Resources.

B. Boats abandoned on public or private property will be handled in the same manner as abandoned vehicles.

**VIII. Documentation and Records**

All vehicles towed and/or stored as abandoned must be recorded in the *Stored/Tagged Vehicle Book* located in the Duty Officers' Room, and documented on an Incident Report. The Incident Report must include the time, date, location, requesting party, reason for the removal or tow, charges pending if applicable, towing service utilized, location of the vehicle, and the notification or attempted notification of the registered owner. In addition, a Vehicle Inventory and Tow Report will be completed for all abandoned vehicles with a copy forwarded to the Towed Vehicle Coordinator.

**IX. CALEA References:** 61.4.3a, 61.4.3b & 61.4.3c.

**X. Proponent Unit:** Support Services

**XI. Cancellation:** Index Code 1910 dated 11/15/02.

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Sheriff Gary Hofmann