

CONSUMER NEWS

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR VEHICLE IS TOWED

KELLY MANNING: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Kelly Manning, Infocast Editor.

Whether your vehicle breaks down and you have to have it towed to a repair shop, or you park your car in an unauthorized parking lot and it is towed, there are laws as well as consumer rights when vehicles are towed.

Lt. Frank Baio, the Division Manager of the Dealers and Repairs Division, is going to go over some issues customers may face when their vehicle is towed.

KELLY MANNING: Lt. Baio, if my vehicle is parked illegally and it is towed, how do I know what location to pick it up at?

LT. BAIO: Well, Kelly, that is all dependent upon where the illegally parked vehicle was taken from. If the vehicle was parked on a public highway or street, you should certainly contact the local police department or the state police troop with jurisdiction in that area. If you left your vehicle in a private parking lot and it was parked illegally, say without a parking pass that was required, you should certainly contact the property owner or property manager who is in charge of that area to see what towing company they've contracted with to remove the vehicle.

KELLY: Is there a limit on how much I can be charged when my vehicle is towed and where do I get these rates?

LT. BAIO: Yes. There are state regulated towing rates and storage charges that are required to be on file with the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles. Those rates are available in any DVM Office and also on line.

KELLY: And I know there are storing rates as well. Are there any limitations on how much a company can charge to store a vehicle?

LT. BAIO: Yes, there are, Kelly. Generally, the company is allowed to charge storage on the vehicle after the first 24 hours and those rates are also on file, whether it's inside or outside storage, and the length and height of the vehicle as well as the weight is also taken into consideration.

KELLY: What can I do if I believe that I was charged too much for towing or storage?

LT. BAIO: Well, first and foremost you have to pay the bill in order to start the dispute of the charges. So you would pay the towing bill. You would get copies of all receipts and forward them to the Department of Motor Vehicles along with a K35 complaint form addressed to the Department of Motor Vehicles and outlining your concerns and the company name which invoked the charges.

KELLY: What would happen if a person left like their wallet or something that was really important in the vehicle that was towed and they needed it right away? Is there anything that they could do?

LT. BAIO: Yes. There are statutory mandates which state that any item deemed to be of health and welfare related has to be immediately released to the vehicle's owner without having to pay the towing bill or remove the vehicle from the place of business.

KELLY: What happens if my vehicle gets towed and gets damaged? Is there anything I can do about this? Do I have any rights?

LT. BAIO: Depending on the situation of when it was damaged. If it was damaged in conjunction with the tow, and it was deemed that it was on the part of the dealer who was involved in towing the vehicle, yes, there are certain provisions that apply. And you should certainly file a complaint with the

Department of Motor Vehicles if this cannot be resolved on a person-to-person level with the towing company.

KELLY: Let's say I own a business and people are constantly parking in my parking lot who are not my customers. How do I get these vehicles towed at the owner's expense?

LT. BAIO: You would need to post a sign in the parking area stating that any unauthorized vehicles will be towed. And you should also list the towing company that has been contracted to remove them. It is up to you to contact the towing company of your choice to provide the service of taking these vehicles out, removing them and charging the storage.

KELLY: Will the towing company provide the signs?

LT. BAIO: No. That is the property owner's responsibility to post the signs so that the motoring public is aware that this is a private parking area.

KELLY: In the past I've parked in a lot that has signs posted that unauthorized vehicles will be towed, but instead I got a ticket instead of being towed. Is this allowed?

LT. BAIO: Yes. It is depending on who is in control of the parking area. If it is a municipality or state run parking facility, you are certainly subject to be prosecuted for any parking violation. If it's private property, most police departments and state police troops will not issue a ticket on private property, but yet have the property owner or manager take responsibility for removing the car.

KELLY: What about getting a boot on my car instead of getting towed. What would I do then?

LT. BAIO: In most cases the municipalities that are using the boots are primarily for back taxes and egregious parking violations. Those are -- under those

conditions, you have to deal directly with the controlling entity in the town whether it be the local police department, state police troop or zoning enforcement.

KELLY: Is there anything I can do as a citizen if vehicles are parked in front of my house for a long period of time and no one's claiming them? Is there anything I can do to get them towed away?

LT. BAIO: You would have to check with your local zoning officer and local police or state police troop in that instance. All local ordinances would govern anything that would be left on a public highway within your town. And certain restrictions do apply and there are certain individual responsibilities of the towns that would take over in this effect.

KELLY: Do you have any other tips or suggestions for consumers or people who have gotten their cars towed?

LT. BAIO: If you feel that you've been overcharged or a vehicle has been damaged, there are certain provisions that do apply within the Department of Motor Vehicles, and there is a complaint process in place. So if you feel you've been wronged in any way, do not hesitate to contact us, and we can certainly advise you as to our jurisdiction in those matters.

KELLY: Is there a phone number people can call?

LT. BAIO: Yes. We have a complaint line in the Department of Motor Vehicles at 860-263-5055, and an inspector should be able to give you the guidance that you need to get you through the problem or at least involved in the complaint process.

KELLY: Okay. Great. Thank you, Lt. Baio, for being with us today. And I just want to remind all consumers if anyone has a problem, please do not hesitate to contact the Department of Motor Vehicles.

KELLY MANNING: This has been an Infocast produced by the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Thank you for listening.