TOWING/STORAGE OF MOTOR VEHICLES

- The Harford County Sheriff’s Office may authorize the towing and storage of motor vehicles for legitimate purposes.
- Examples of legitimate purposes include: abandoned vehicles, recovered stolen vehicles, vehicles involved in motor vehicle crashes, vehicles involved in criminal activity, and for motor vehicle violations where the operator is arrested.
- When authorizing the towing and storage of motor vehicles, deputies shall utilize tow companies from the Harford County Sheriff’s Office list of approved, licensed tow operators. (See exception on page 5-3800 OWNER/OPERATOR REQUEST).

REQUESTING DEPUTY

- A deputy requesting a tow truck shall use the following terminology when calling for a tow:
  1. “Deputy storage next on the list.”
  2. “Owner’s request next on the list.”
  3. “Owner specific name of tow company.”
- If a deputy requires the services of a tow company, the deputy shall contact Dispatch and request the next available tow company on the rotation list to respond. Dispatch is required to call the tow company, and if it is a storage, enter the vehicle information in the Department of Emergency Operations (DEO) “tow-in” log. Dispatch shall, at the request of the deputy, attempt notification to the vehicle owner by telephone of the storage.
- The deputy shall inform Dispatch of the number and type of vehicle(s) and other pertinent information regarding the tow situation.
- If the tow company does not arrive at the scene within thirty (30) minutes after the request has been made, the deputy shall notify Dispatch. Dispatch shall recontact the tow company to ascertain the cause of the delay. If the agency is not reasonably satisfied that the tow company will arrive at the scene within ten (10) minutes after the second call, Dispatch shall inform the company to terminate its response. Dispatch shall then notify the next tow company on the rotation list. Consideration will be given to adverse traffic patterns, weather conditions and/or other causes.
- The deputy shall provide the tow company with the vehicle owner’s name, address and telephone number, if known.
- If a deputy determines that a vehicle is being utilized for violations of the controlled dangerous substance laws, and the vehicle may need to be stored for processing or forfeiture, the deputy shall have the Watch Commander/Duty Officer contact the on call deputy/supervisor from the Special Investigations Division prior to notifying a tow company. It will then be the decision of the Special Investigations Division representative to determine where the vehicle is to be taken, and how it will be transported.
SHERIFF’S OFFICE
AUTHORIZATION

- Whenever a deputy authorizes the storage of a motor vehicle he/she shall:
  1. Conduct a registration/stolen check (10-28 and 10-29) of the tag and vehicle identification number (VIN). If for any reason MILES/NCIC is unavailable, the deputy shall conduct this check at the earliest time possible after the system becomes available. A copy of this shall be attached to the report.
  2. Inventory the vehicle prior to storage of the vehicle by the tow company.
    a. Motor Vehicle Storage Form (SO-004) shall be completed.
    b. All valuables taken into custody for safe keeping shall be listed on a Property/Evidence Form (SO-258), Cash Confiscation Record (SO-037), or Asset Forfeiture Confiscation Report (SO-036), as circumstances dictate, and submitted to Property Management or the appropriate unit.
    EXCEPTION: Crashes where the vehicle operator is able to take custody of the property at the scene.
    c. The inventory shall encompass all areas and containers:
      1) Interior of vehicle.
      2) Glove box and console(s).
      3) Trunk.
      4) Unlocked containers, (i.e. briefcases, luggage etc.).
    d. Deputies shall not break open locked/sealed containers in order to inventory them.
    e. Locked containers shall be listed on the Vehicle Storage Form as “one locked/sealed container”, with a description of the container.
  3. Make every effort to contact the owner of the vehicle if he/she is not present at the time of storage and note the results in the narrative of the Motor Vehicle Storage Report. The deputy is required to advise Dispatch to attempt a telephone call to the owner regarding the storage. If contact is not made by telephone, or if there is no telephone number of the owner, and the owner’s address is in Harford County, a deputy shall make personal contact at the residence with the owner or a relative. If the residence is located out of Harford County, the deputy shall advise Records to send a teletype to the jurisdictional police agency asking that they make notification. A copy of the teletype is to be added to the report.
  4. Indicate in the narrative of the report if a “hold” was placed on the vehicle, and if so, note the reason. The investigating deputy shall be responsible for removing the “hold” as soon as it is no longer needed and to notify the owner that he/she may take possession of the vehicle.
  5. Complete a written follow-up within seventy-two hours if the owner of the vehicle has not been contacted or identified. The report will include:
    a. Documentation of the deputy’s attempts to make contact.
b. An additional stolen check (10-29) to ensure that the vehicle has not been reported stolen since the date of the original report.

6. The report shall remain "open" until the owner is contacted or all investigative leads have been exhausted. If a deputy is unable to contact the owner within 72 hours, the deputy will fill out and mail a Notice of Impounded Vehicle (form S)-081) form to the registered owner of the stored vehicle. The form will be sent via Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested. When the deputy receives the Return Receipt he/she will submit a supplemental report with a copy of the letter and the receipt attached. The deputy’s supervisor will forward the report to the traffic unit for further follow-up. A database containing a log of stored vehicles will be available to all supervisors. It will be the responsibility of the supervisor reviewing the storage report to enter the appropriate information into the HCSO database. Supervisors shall check the HCSO database daily to monitor all follow-up investigations of his/her respective personnel. When a vehicle is released it is the responsibility of the On-Duty Supervisor to make the appropriate entry in the DEO "tow in" log and note this information in the comment section in the HCSO database.

- When the Records Section receives a stolen vehicle report, the Records Clerk shall check the HCSO Towing Database prior to entering the vehicle into NCIC. If the vehicle is in the HCSO Towing Database it will not be entered into NCIC. The reporting deputy and his/her supervisor shall be notified by the Records Clerk via e-mail that the reported stolen vehicle is in the HCSO Towing Database. A copy of the e-mail shall be attached to the report. The Records Clerk shall await confirmation from the reporting deputy/supervisor before entering the vehicle into NCIC.

VEHICLE RELEASE

- Once a vehicle is stored by the Sheriff's Office a motor vehicle release form is required to release the vehicle. The tow facility may not release a vehicle to the owner if it was a Sheriff's Office storage, unless the Sheriff's Office signs the motor vehicle release. The tow company must advise the owner to respond to a precinct (North or South) and speak to the Duty Officer or the Watch Commander on duty to obtain a release form. Communications will direct all phone calls from tow companies and vehicle owners to the precinct for release information. The Duty Officer/Watch Commander will check the DEO “tow-in” logs & HCSO towing database, verify the vehicle can be released, and advise the owner to respond to the appropriate precinct for the vehicle release form. Upon verification of the identity and paperwork of the person that the vehicle is being released to, the supervisor will issue a vehicle release form and direct them to the appropriate tow company for their vehicle.
- If the vehicle is released, the Duty Officer/Watch Commander shall enter the release in the DEO “tow-in” log and the HCSO towing database. All paperwork shall be forwarded to the Records Section.
- The Traffic Unit shall conduct follow-ups on motor vehicle storages that are forwarded by patrol shift supervisors. Once a vehicle owner is
contacted and fails to pick up the vehicle, or is unable to be contacted, the traffic unit shall begin salvage procedures.

• The following procedures shall be followed in salvaging a vehicle:
  1. The registration (10-28/10-29) shall be checked on the tag/VIN.
  2. A lien request must be sent to MVA for the lien information.
  3. A Certified Return Receipt requested letter must be sent to all vehicle owners (registered, last known) and all lien holders advising “notice of intention to dispose of an abandoned vehicle.” A three-week waiting period is required from the time the letter is sent and returned, or from the date of delivery prior to the salvage process.
  4. A copy of the letter sent to the owner/lien holder must be faxed to Circuit Court and posted in a public place for a three week period prior to having the vehicle salvaged.
  5. A salvage certificate shall be filled out by a deputy in the traffic section to dispose of a vehicle.
  6. For vehicles with an unknown owner at the time of storage, the traffic unit must run the VIN of the vehicle through every state. If no owner is found, then a copy of the notice of intention to dispose of abandoned vehicle must be filled out with an unknown owner and complete vehicle information. This is then faxed to the Circuit Court and posted for the three-week period per salvage policies.
  7. When a vehicle is salvaged it is the responsibility of the deputy handling the salvage to make the appropriate entry in the DEO “tow in” log and to note the salvage in the HCSO tow database comment section.
  8. Make copies and document all paperwork.

OWNER/OPERATOR REQUESTS

• The owner/operator of a vehicle may request the services of a tow company that is not on the list of authorized Harford County tow companies, provided:
  1. The vehicle will not be held for evidence, processing or other investigative purposes.
  2. The tow service requested can respond to the scene within the allotted thirty (30) minute time period and remove the vehicle in a safe manner.
  3. Completion of a Motor Vehicle Storage Report (SO-004) is not required.
  4. Exception – Tow companies must be on the list to tow from accident scenes.

ARRESTED VEHICLE OPERATORS

• A person who is arrested while operating a motor vehicle may secure his/her vehicle and allow it to remain legally parked if:
  1. The vehicle is not being held for evidence, processing, or other investigative purposes.
  2. The operator is aware of his/her actions and agrees to assume full responsibility for the vehicle.
3. The operator can make arrangements to have the vehicle removed within a reasonable time period.
   • If the vehicle is owned by someone other than the operator, the deputy shall attempt to contact the owner and advise the owner of the vehicle’s location.

**RECOVERED STOLEN VEHICLES**

- Whenever a vehicle that has been reported stolen by the Harford County Sheriff’s Office is recovered in Harford County, the CID supervisor or the on-call CID supervisor shall be notified. If the CID supervisor determines that the vehicle will require processing, the Evidence Collection Unit shall respond to process the vehicle.
- If the CID supervisor determines that a recovered stolen vehicle will **not** require processing, the investigating deputy shall attempt to contact the owner prior to storage of the vehicle. The owner shall be given the opportunity to respond to the scene of the recovery to take possession of the vehicle, provided:
  1. The vehicle is not creating a traffic hazard.
  2. The owner can respond in a reasonable time period.

**AGENCY VEHICLES**

- When an agency vehicle becomes disabled, stuck, or will need to be towed for any reason, only agency approved tow operators shall be used.
- **Under no circumstances shall an agency member utilize the assistance of a private citizen’s vehicle to tow an agency vehicle.**

**PROCEDURES**

- Contact Dispatch and advise of the location, vehicle number, and other pertinent information regarding the tow situation.
- During normal business hours (Monday-Friday from 0700-2300hrs), request that Dispatch contact a representative of First Vehicle Services. First Vehicle Services will then notify a tow operator from their approved tow operators to respond.
  - **Exception:** If the agency vehicle is a traffic hazard, or has been involved in a crash, the tow company must be a licensed Harford County tow operator that is able to respond within 30 minutes.
- During all other hours, weekends and holidays, request that Dispatch contact the Watch Commander/Duty Officer for authorization to notify a tow company from the Harford County Sheriff’s Office list of approved, licensed tow operators to respond.