



## PROCEDURES FOR PERFORMING TRESPASS TOWING IN HOWARD COUNTY

**Note:** This document is only a summary of required procedures. Please refer to Sections 17.600-17.611 of the Howard County Code to ensure full compliance.

**Registration:** Tow companies must be registered with the Office of Consumer Protection (“OCP”) before they perform any trespass towing in Howard County.

**Contracts:** Tow companies must have signed contracts with property managers / owners of all properties from which they will be towing vehicles. Contracts are subject to inspection as requested by this office.

**Signage:** Tow companies and/or property managers must post signs on the property from which cars can be towed. All signs must be at least 24” high by 30” wide, and include:

- a summary of all parking restrictions and a statement that vehicles that violate the restrictions may be towed at owner’s expense;
- the name and telephone number of the tow service;
- the address to which vehicles will be towed;
- the maximum fee vehicle owners can be charged;
- a statement that vehicles can be redeemed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- a statement that vehicle owners can contact OCP at 410-313-6420

**Authorization to Tow:** Tow companies must obtain the express authorization of the property owner, management or agent immediately prior to towing any vehicles from a property. Pre-authorizations are not permitted. Towing companies may not utilize “spotters” to look for unauthorized parked vehicles for the purpose of towing.

Authorizations must be in the form of a tow slip and must contain the:

- address from which the vehicle was towed;
- date and time of the tow;
- make, model, year, and color of vehicle;
- vehicle identification number (VIN) and license plate number;
- reason for the tow; and
- signature of the property owner or management, and tow truck driver.

Vehicles cannot be towed for failure to display a valid current registration sticker until 72 hours after a notice of violation is placed on the vehicle.

**Authorization Exceptions:** Unauthorized vehicles may be towed without the express authorization of the owner / property manager only if they are directly blocking access to the property or a building on the property. Vehicles towed from fire lanes,

handicapped spaces, or tows requested by police officers, firefighters, and rescue squad members are not subject to the trespass tow statute.

**Notification of Tow:** Within one hour of towing a vehicle from a property, the tow company must notify the Howard County Police Department and OCP. If OCP is closed, the information can be faxed to (410)313-6453. Notifications must contain the:

- make, model, color, year, VIN and tag number of the vehicle towed;
- address from which the vehicle was towed;
- time the vehicle was towed;
- address of the storage site to which the vehicle will be towed.

**Storage of Vehicles:** Vehicles must be towed to a storage site located within 12 miles from the origin of the tow, and remain at that site for at least 72 hours. The towing service must be open for redemption of vehicles 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, and:

- be brightly lit at all times;
- keep vehicles secure at all times;
- display the sign provided by the OCP at the entrance of the lot; and
- display a sign at the redemption area that lists all rates for towing, storage and other services. Rates may not exceed those set by the Howard County Council.

**Inspection and Retrieval of Personal Property:** The storage site must make vehicles available to their owners, owners' agent, secured parties or the insurers of record for inspection and retrieval of personal property that is not attached to the vehicles.

**Notification of Storage:** If a vehicle has not been redeemed within 3 days of the tow, the towing company must notify the owner, any secured party and the insurer or record by certified mail, return receipt requested and first class mail of the same information provided to Howard Co. Police and OCP, along with the itemized actual cost of proving the notice.

**Redemption:** Cash and traveler's checks and either 2 major credit cards or checks must be accepted for the payment of towing and storage charges.

When vehicles are redeemed, the tow company must provide an itemized receipt of the:

- actions performed by the tow company;
- amount paid to redeem the vehicle, and payment method used;
- date and time of redemption;
- signature of the tow company's agent;
- name, address and telephone number of tow company;
- following statement: "If you have any questions, or wish to obtain a copy of the law, contact the Office of Consumer Protection at (410) 313-6420."

**I acknowledge that I have read and understand these procedures.**

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Signature

Date

To obtain this factsheet in an alternative format, please contact the Office of Consumer Protection at 410-313-6420 (voice/relay) or email us at [consumer@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:consumer@howardcountymd.gov).