

**HARRIS COUNTY TOW TRUCK ORDINANCE
FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT TOWING AND STORAGE SERVICES**

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I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

A. Purpose and Scope

1. Harris County, pursuant to the authority granted by state law, in order to protect the public, to protect the rights of persons whose vehicles may be towed, to maintain safe and efficient operating rules, and to preserve the peace of the community, hereby engage in the licensing and regulation of business enterprises engaged in the law enforcement towing, removing, and storing of motor vehicles in the unincorporated areas of Harris County at the request of a law enforcement officer.
2. This ordinance shall be deemed an “ordinance” as that word is used in Texas Transportation Code Section 545.306 and as hereafter amended.
3. The Harris County Sheriff’s Office (hereafter “HCSO”) is authorized to enforce these rules.
4. Accordingly, no person shall operate a tow truck or heavy-duty tow truck at the request of a law enforcement officer in the unincorporated areas of Harris County on law enforcement towed vehicles unless the tow truck has been registered with the HCSO. This ordinance does not apply to a tow conducted pursuant to a contract with the county for such services, in which case services will be pursuant to the contract rather than this regulation.
5. Furthermore, no person or business entity shall operate a vehicle storage facility for the storage of motor vehicles that have been subjected to law enforcement tows under this ordinance unless the facility is registered with the HCSO, provided that this prohibition shall not apply if the vehicle is instead taken to a location designated by the vehicle’s owner.
6. The HCSO has selected a Towing Management System (TMS) to support electronic management of towed vehicles at VSFs.

B. Jurisdiction

These rules apply to all removals or storage of motor vehicles authorized by Texas Transportation Code Section 545.305 and as hereafter amended, in the unincorporated areas of Harris County.

C. Construction

The Code Construction Act of Texas (Texas Government Code Chapter 311, et seq.) applies for the purpose of construing these rules unless an alternative instruction, definition, or application is contained herein.

1. The word “shall” is mandatory and not discretionary as used in this ordinance.
2. The word “rule” includes “regulation,” “ordinance” or “order” and all have the same meaning as applied in this ordinance.
3. This ordinance must be liberally construed to give effect to its purpose and intent.

D. Definitions

The following words and terms, when used in this ordinance, shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

Adverse Action: an action that occurs when a person’s or entity’s permit, chip, or ID is collected by or surrendered to a tow truck inspector or HCSO VCD supervisor.

Anonymous: expression of communication of thoughts or opinions from an unknown source; writing, expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication created by or containing unknown persons.

Applicant: a person who applies for a Harris County ID, permit, or chip, or fills out an application for renewal or replacement.

Application: the written form approved by the HCSO and all required documentation and all applicable fees.

Arrest: a situation where a law enforcement officer takes the vehicle operator into custody.

Automated Clearing House (ACH): method to facilitate electronic funds transfers (payments) between entities.

Auxiliary Tow Lights: a set of red lamps connected to the tow truck or operated wirelessly, which are attached to the rear of the towed vehicle, and when lit, will signal stops and turn movements of the towed vehicle.

Chip: a numbered metal tag that is issued to each tow truck by the HCSO to be used to match at a law enforcement scene and which chip number corresponds with the tow truck permit number.

Consent Tow: any tow of a motor vehicle where the owner or operator of the vehicle or by a person who has possession, custody, or control of the vehicle summons the tow truck. The term does not include an incident management tow or a private property tow.

Contract Tow Truck: a tow truck or towing company that is under contract with a law enforcement agency to perform towing services, including law enforcement tows from evidentiary crime scenes, and which also possesses a valid permit under this ordinance (whether or not contractually required to be permitted under this ordinance). This does not include a tow truck that is owned and operated by a law enforcement agency or its sponsoring government unit.

Conviction: a finding of guilt by a judge or jury, or any plea of guilty or *nolo contendere* unless such conviction has been held invalid by the courts, or the proceedings against the defendant have been dismissed and the defendant discharged by the court.

Crash: a situation where one or more motor vehicles have collided with any other motor vehicle or object.

District: a predefined response or assignment area located within the jurisdiction of the Harris County Sheriff; boundaries of districts are subject to change from time to time.

Emergency Lights: flashing, rotating or strobe lights that are mounted above the roof of the tow truck. The lights shall be mounted as high and as wide as possible and visible in all directions when activated. Additional lighting is allowed for a stationary tow truck using equipment authorized by Texas Transportation Code Sections 545.157 and 547.305.

Evidentiary Crime Scene: a crime scene in unincorporated Harris County that requires the response of a law enforcement agency’s specialized investigative unit(s). Examples include, but are not limited to: a homicide scene or an auto theft “chop shop.”

Freeway: the entire public right-of-way of a divided, controlled-access highway located within the county, including its roadway lanes, ramps, shoulders, unimproved areas, but excluding frontage or service roads.

HCSO: Harris County Sheriff’s Office

Heavy Duty Tow Truck: TDLR-approved extendable boom, tandem axle tow trucks. An acceptable heavy-duty tow truck shall have a minimum boom manufacturer rating of 30 tons. Each heavy-duty tow truck shall have a minimum of two winches with a minimum of 30,000 pound manufacturer rating with a minimum of 200 feet of ¾ inch diameter wire rope. The end of each wire rope shall be swaged.

High Mounted Stop Lamp: a lamp conforming to 49 C.F.R. Section 571.108.

Hooked Up: a motor vehicle has been hooked up when it has been attached to a tow truck, lifted in tow position, configured with tow lights and safety chains, and if necessary placed on a dolly in a raised position such that the only act remaining for the tow operator is to drive away.

ID Cards: identification cards issued to a tow truck operator upon approval by the HCSO. Each card contains the applicant’s physical description and includes, but is not limited to, the following: photograph, date of birth P, Texas driver’s license number, current employer, date the ID card is issued, and date of expiration.

Law Enforcement Officer: the Harris County Sheriff, the Harris County Fire Marshal, a Harris County Constable, or their deputies and other peace officers (see Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Article 2.12) commissioned by Harris County or Harris County officials.

Law Enforcement Scene: the scene of a crime, collision, or arrest, or the location of a vehicle, which is a traffic hazard, a recovered stolen vehicle, or an abandoned vehicle.

Law Enforcement Tow: any tow conducted at a law enforcement scene or evidentiary crime scene initiated by a law enforcement officer.

Match: the selection process used by a law enforcement officer to determine which tow truck operator will perform a law enforcement tow at a law enforcement scene or, when applicable, at an evidentiary crime scene.

Motor Vehicle: a vehicle subject to Texas Transportation Code Section 501.002 et. seq., and as hereafter amended, or any other device designed to be self-propelled or transported on any public highway, road, or street.

Nearest Place of Safety: during the period each day between 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M., the nearest permitted vehicle storage facility that is lighted, manned on a twenty-four hour basis, and provides the vehicle owner with access to a telephone and other facilities or other safe place, and at all other times, the nearest licensed storage facility or other safe place.

Non-consent Tow: the tow of a motor vehicle in every instance in which the vehicle owner is unwilling or unable to designate a tow operator to remove the vehicle, including instances in which the vehicle is: (i) abandoned or stolen, or (ii) being operated by a person who is the subject of an arrest or who is physically or mentally unable or unwilling to request a tow operator or destination, when a law enforcement officer determines that no other authorized person is present and able to remove the vehicle.

Operate: to drive or otherwise use a tow truck or the mechanics of a tow truck.

Operator: any person driving or operating the mechanics of a tow truck, regardless of whether the person owns the truck.

Permit Holder: the person to whom the HCSO issues a permit.

Public Road: a road, street, or highway that has not been discontinued and that has been established by law, and includes each publicly maintained road or highway opened to and used by the public.

Safe Place: a location chosen with regard to the following criteria: the age, physical or other condition of the vehicle owner, including whether the vehicle owner is accompanied by one or more minor children, the remoteness of the location, the proximity of authorities or persons who could render aid or assistance, the time of day, the climatic conditions, the character of the location or surrounding neighborhood, and the vehicle owner's knowledge or familiarity with the location or surrounding neighborhood.

Stalled Vehicle: a vehicle that has a flat tire or other mechanical problems, is out of gas or, due to other factors other than physical damage from a collision, may not be operated in a normal manner.

Storage Company: a person, partnership, corporation, or any other association that is engaged in the business of storing motor vehicles for compensation or the expectation of compensation. The term includes the owner, operator, employee, and/or agent of the storage company.

Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act: Texas Occupations Code, Chapter 2303, as amended, and successor statutes thereto.

Tow: the removal from public or private property of a vehicle, including a trailer towed by the vehicle, by means of a tow truck only.

Tow Management Company (TMC): an entity that will act as an authorized agent for the HCSO and perform various functions on behalf of the HCSO. The TMC will provide a technology platform to support the HCSO law enforcement towing and its Towing Management System (TMS).

Tow Management System (TMS): the technology platform provided by the TMC and utilized by the HCSO Towing and Storage Unit to aid in the management of the processes of towing and storing vehicles under this ordinance. Permitted towing companies, Private property tows from unincorporated areas of Harris County, and VSFs shall utilize the TMS to enter the required tow information.

Tow Truck: a motor vehicle adapted or used to tow, carry, push, winch, or otherwise move any motor vehicle; commonly called a "wrecker."

Tow Truck Inspector: a person designated by the HCSO to enforce this ordinance and authorized to seize any HCSO property including, but not limited to, ID cards, chips, and permits. The Tow Truck Inspector is authorized to enforce rules/regulations through the TMS.
Tow Truck Permit: a numbered tag issued by the HCSO authorizing a specific tow truck to perform law enforcement tows and that includes a tow truck permit number.

Towing Company: a person, partnership, corporation, or any other association that is engaged in the business of towing motor vehicles on a public road, for compensation or with the expectation of compensation, or who owns or operates a tow truck for which a permit has been issued under this ordinance. This term includes the owner, operator, employee, and / or agent of the towing company.

Unethical Behavior: pertaining to or dealing with conduct and behavior by a towing company, owner or operator that shows a lack of honesty, trustworthiness, and / or integrity.

VCD: Harris County Sheriff's Office Vehicular Crimes Division

Vehicle Owner: the motor vehicle's legal or registered owner, or such owner's authorized representative who is physically present at the law enforcement scene.

Vehicle Storage Facility (VSF): a person, partnership, corporation, or any other association (other than a governmental entity) that is engaged in the business of operating a garage, parking lot, storage lot, or any type of facility to store motor vehicles subject to law enforcement tows under this ordinance.

Vehicle Storage Facility Permit: a document issued by the HCSO that grants the holder the right to store motor vehicles that were the subject of law enforcement tows under this ordinance.

Working Day: any day that the HCSO conducts normal business, excluding Harris County holidays and weekends.

Wrecked Vehicle: a vehicle that, due to a collision, is incapable of being driven or moved.

Written Directive: a document issued to a tow truck operator by a law enforcement officer directing a vehicle to be towed. Example: tow slip.

E. Surrender of Department Property

1. All ID cards, chips, and permits are the property of the HCSO.
2. Any HCSO VCD supervisor with rank of sergeant or above, or other personnel designated as tow truck inspector is authorized to require any person in possession of HCSO property to surrender such property immediately. The HCSO shall hold such property pending any appeal under Article VII.
3. A person, storage company, or towing company required to surrender an ID card, chip, or permit may appeal to the HCSO pursuant to Article VII of this ordinance.
4. It is a violation of this ordinance to refuse to surrender any HCSO property when required.

F. Fees and Charges

1. All fees and charges relating to the law enforcement towing and storage of motor vehicles, the issuance of any permits, chips, ID cards, and all other applicable fees and charges are set forth in Article VIII.
2. The fees and charges set forth in Article VIII may be approved or amended by the Commissioners' Court in the manner authorized by law for taking official action. The fee or charge shall be in an amount that will offset the entire cost of implementing and enforcing this ordinance as permitted by state law.
3. Tow truck permits that are for less than 12 months will not be prorated. Any portion of a month shall be deemed an entire month.
4. Unless otherwise indicated, all fees are non-refundable.

G. Effect of Other Laws

It is not intended, and no term of this ordinance should be so construed, to contravene any applicable law or to pre-empt any federal statute. Notwithstanding the use of terminology that might be construed to include matters not within the legal scope of this ordinance, it is intended that such terms be construed as limited to such legal scope. To the extent that any part or any provision in this ordinance might otherwise be construed as invalid, illegal, or unenforceable in any respect, it should be construed as being limited in its scope and application to only those circumstances to which it can legally apply. To the extent that any provision or part thereof is still found to be invalid, illegal, or unenforceable in any respect, it shall not affect any other provision.

II. TOWING COMPANIES

A. Permit and Chip Required

1. It is a violation of this ordinance for a towing company to perform law enforcement tows in the unincorporated areas of Harris County without a current and valid permit, chip, and, where utilized, an active TMS account.
2. The permit shall be affixed to the rear of the tow truck and be clearly visible at all times.
3. Towing companies are responsible for the permits issued to them. If a permit or chip is lost or stolen, a police report is required, and the towing company shall pay for its replacement.
4. It is a violation of this ordinance to possess more than one chip with the same number or to possess a chip that does not match a tow truck's permit number.
5. Except as to heavy-duty tow trucks, a numbered metal chip issued by the HCSO that corresponds with the tow truck permit number must be carried by the operator of each tow truck at all times when operating tow truck. This metal chip is required for any tow truck to participate in a law enforcement tow at any law enforcement or evidentiary crime scene.
6. The HCSO shall only issue one (1) metal chip per tow truck.
7. An altered or mutilated chip shall not be used in the matching process. If, while conducting a match, the law enforcement officer determines that the chip is altered or mutilated beyond normal wear and tear, the officer may require that the chip be immediately surrendered to a

HCSO supervisor with the rank of sergeant or above, or personnel designated as a tow truck inspector. It shall be the responsibility of the towing company to obtain a replacement chip.

B. Application Process

1. To obtain a permit and chip for any tow truck, a towing company shall file an application each year between October 1st and October 15th with the HCSO. The application will include:
 - a. Year and make of the tow truck to which the permit will apply;
 - b. Vehicle identification number (VIN) of the tow truck;
 - c. Current Texas permit plate number for the tow truck;
 - d. Name, address, and telephone number of the tow truck owner;
 - e. The operator's Texas Operator's license number;
 - f. The name of the insurance company, the policy number, and the insurance agent's name and telephone number;
 - g. A list of the storage lots the operator uses and that are listed on the tow truck; and
 - h. The applicant's original signature.
2. The application form shall be accompanied by:
 - a. Copy of "Tow Truck Cab Card" issued by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR);
 - b. Receipt from the Harris County Tax Office showing current registration, or if the tow truck is registered outside Harris County, the current registration from the county where the tow truck is located;
 - c. Copy of the towing company's most recent tow truck invoice;
 - d. Current original business card for the towing company which shall include the business name, business phone number and all addresses and phone numbers of storage lots to be used by the towing company; and

Original "Certificate Of Insurance" for the tow truck being permitted and the certificate holder named as follows:

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
ATTN: VCD /Towing and Storage Unit
4101 Interwood North Parkway, Suite 200
Houston, Texas 77032

3. The application must be submitted to the HCSO by hand delivery or by delivery through the United States Postal Service or any private courier service. The HCSO may require this application process to be completed through the approved TMS electronic application software.

C. Application Fee

An applicant for a tow truck permit and chip shall not be required to pay a fee to submit an application, but no permit shall go into effect until a permit fee as provided in Article VIII is paid

D. Issuance

1. If the HCSO determines that the applicant has satisfied all requirements under this ordinance, including an inspection by a tow truck inspector or other HCSO-designated personnel, it shall issue a permit and chip.
2. If an application is denied or its renewal refused due to failing the inspection of the tow truck, the HCSO shall conduct a subsequent inspection to verify that there are no additional violations. The HCSO shall charge an additional inspection fee as provided in Article VIII.
3. The HCSO shall not approve an application for a replacement chip unless the applicant already possesses a valid tow truck permit.

E. Expiration of Permit / Chip

1. All tow truck permits expire annually at 11:59 pm on January 31st, regardless of the issue date. To renew a permit, the permit holder shall file a renewal application. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the approved TMS electronic application software.
2. A chip is valid only with its corresponding permit and expires only when its corresponding permit expires. It is the responsibility of a chip holder to have the chip replaced if it is torn or mutilated beyond normal wear and tear.

F. Permit Renewal

1. Annual renewal applications shall be submitted to the HCSO between October 1st and October 15th of each year. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the approved TMS electronic application software. Late applications for renewal will not be accepted and will require the requester to follow the steps outlined in II (B) of this ordinance.
2. A tow truck owner who fails to renew the permit before it expires shall return the permit and chip to the HCSO no later than February 1st, or the owner will be in violation of this ordinance.
3. Operating a tow truck with an expired permit constitutes a violation of this ordinance.

G. Permits / Chips are Non-transferable

1. Permits and / or chips are not assignable or transferable, except that a permit and / or chip may be transferred to a replacement truck if:
 - a. It belongs to the same towing company;
 - b. The towing company obtains the HCSO's written permission;
 - c. The replacement truck passes inspection; and
 - d. Proof of insurance is submitted to the HCSO.
2. Failure to follow these procedures is a violation of this ordinance.

H. Insurance Requirements

1. Prior to the issuance of any tow truck permit, the applicant shall file with the HCSO proof of motor vehicle liability insurance coverage issued by an insurance company listed as an authorized auto liability lines carrier on the Texas Department of Insurance list of authorized insurance companies. Such insurance shall meet all requirements set forth below. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the approved TMS electronic application software.
2. Proof of financial responsibility shall be made available upon request.
3. An applicant shall procure, and keep in full force and effect, a policy of liability and property damage insurance. At the time of initial registration and upon renewal, the registrant shall file a certificate of insurance with the HCSO. The certificate shall clearly specify the type and amount of insurance coverage and provide for thirty-day (30) notice to the HCSO of cancellation of, or a material change in, the policy.
4. Each policy shall be issued by a casualty insurance company authorized to do business in the State of Texas and that complies with all applicable rules and regulations of the State Board of Insurance.
5. The minimum insurance requirements for each tow truck are as follows:
 - a. A minimum of \$500,000 liability insurance per tow truck per incident, which is combined single limit liability for bodily injury to or death of a person per occurrence, loss or damage (excluding cargo) per occurrence, or both.
 - b. Each tow truck shall have an on hook / cargo insurance policy of at least \$50,000.00 coverage.
6. The certificate of insurance shall also specifically state:
 - a. That the policy covers the vehicle subject to the permit;
 - b. Identify the vehicle by year, make and vehicle identification number and list all drivers insured on the liability policy; and
 - c. Indicate that the policy complies with the minimum liability limits established by these rules.
7. A towing company shall maintain insurance for each tow truck it owns or operates which meets the requirements of all other applicable statutes in addition to meeting the insurance requirements set forth in this ordinance. A law enforcement officer may inspect the tow truck for the insurance coverage.
8. A towing company shall not participate in any law enforcement tows if it fails to maintain the required insurance limits.

I. Required Identification on Tow Trucks

1. Each towing company that has been issued a towing permit shall maintain the following identification markings on each tow truck it owns or operates:

- a. The owner's legal business name or legal assumed name as specified on the "Tow Truck Cab Card" issued by TDLR;
 - b. The city and state in which the owner's business office is located;
 - c. The towing company name and phone number, including area code, shall be permanently inscribed or affixed on the front and / or the rear doors on each side of each permitted tow truck in letters that are at least 3 inches high and ½ inch wide, in contrasting colors, and clearly visible at 50 feet during normal daylight. Ghost decals or lettering are not permitted. All other required markings shall be at least 2 inches high and ½ inch wide;
 - d. Display a permit plate issued by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation pursuant to Texas Occupations Code Section 2308.109 and as hereafter amended or its successor statute;
 - e. Display the letters "HCW" followed by the tow truck permit number on each side of the front fenders of each tow truck it owns or operates;
 - f. Display on the bed of the tow truck the address of the vehicle storage facility in letters at least 2 inches high and ½ inch wide. Alternatively, this information can be affixed to both sides of the rollback itself or on the storage box as long as it is visible from the side of the vehicle; and
 - g. The name, city, and state of the tow truck owner as it appears on the registration must be on both sides of the tow truck in letters at least 2 inches high.
2. It is a violation of this ordinance if a permitted towing company:
- a. Fails to satisfy any requirements listed in this section; or
 - b. Uses magnetic or removable signs; or
 - c. Has additional stickers or logos that are not related to the operations of towing a vehicle. (e.g., "In memory of," bumper stickers, etc.)

J. Required Records

1. Each towing company issued a permit shall maintain a record of all tows for a minimum period of three (3) years. The HCSO may inspect all records, including, but not limited to, tow truck slips from law enforcement officers and charges to customers relating to vehicles towed by the towing company.
2. Each towing company that has been issued a permit shall maintain records of all employees who are authorized to conduct law enforcement tows within unincorporated areas of Harris County. These records are to include, but are not limited to, a photocopy of the employee's county-issued ID card with the towing company's name clearly displayed, date of hire, and proof of insurance with the driver's name listed, prior to allowing the employee to conduct law enforcement tows. The employee's records must be maintained for a minimum period of three (3) years.

3. A towing company's failure to provide the HCSO with access to records or failure to provide requested records is a violation of this ordinance.

K. Denial, Refusal to Renew, Suspension, or Revocation

The HCSO may deny, refuse to renew, suspend, or revoke a permit or chip issued under this ordinance in accordance with Article VII.

III. TOW TRUCK OPERATORS

A. Identification Card(s) Required (ID card)

1. The operator must have a current ID card(s) issued by the HCSO to participate in law enforcement tows within the unincorporated areas of Harris County.
2. No person shall allow, permit, or cause any person to drive or operate any permitted tow truck at a law enforcement scene or evidentiary crime scene unless the operator also has a current ID card issued by the HCSO.
3. When at a law enforcement scene, the operator of a permitted tow truck shall clearly display the ID card on his / her person.
4. The operator's current employer must be listed on the operator's ID card. Changes in employer must be corrected on the operator's ID card when the operator's ID card is next renewed, replaced or reissued.

B. Application Process

To obtain an ID card(s), the applicant shall submit an application on a form furnished by the HCSO. The Harris County Tow Truck Operator ID Card Application form can be found at HARRISCOUNTYSO.ORG in the Towing and Storage forms. The application must be completed in its entirety. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the approved TMS electronic application software.

C. Application Fee

An applicant for an ID card shall not be required to pay a fee to submit an application, but no ID card shall be issued until the applicable ID card fee as provided in Article VIII is paid.

D. Issuance of ID Card

The HCSO shall issue an ID card after the applicant satisfies the requirements of this article.

E. Expiration, Renewal, and Replacement of ID Card

1. Each ID card shall expire on the applicant's birthday each year or the listed date on the ID.
2. To renew or replace his or her ID card or change employer, the operator shall file an application and pay the fees provided in Article VIII.
3. If the operator's ID card(s) is lost or destroyed, the operator may obtain a replacement ID card by:
 - a. Filing a police report; and
 - b. Paying a replacement fee as provided in Article VIII.

F. Denial, Refusal to Renew, Suspension, or Revocation

The HCSO may deny, refuse to renew, suspend, or revoke an ID card issued under this ordinance in accordance with Article VII. An application shall not be accepted if the applicant has violated Article VII and is currently under suspension or revocation.

IV. TOW TRUCK OPERATOR RULES AND REGULATIONS

A. Safety Requirements

1. No person shall participate in a law enforcement tow unless the tow truck being used is equipped with the following equipment:
 - a. Brakes that meet braking performance requirements under all loading conditions;
 - b. A power winch, winch line, and boom, with factory-rated lifted capacity of not less than eight thousand (8,000) pounds, single line capacity or a hydraulic wheel lift with a factory-rated lifting capacity of not less than 3,000 pounds when extended;
 - c. A hydraulic lift sufficient to prevent swinging of any equipment and / or vehicle being transported and / or towed. Sling trucks cannot be used. This subsection does not apply to a vehicle carrier or rollback unless the wheels of a vehicle being towed are in contact with the ground. In the event that a self-contained non-propelled towing device or some other form of auxiliary device is used, the vehicle to which that device is attached and which is providing the movement and braking forces, does not need to provide this equipment;
 - d. 5/16-inch link steel safety chains for tow trucks with a gross vehicle weight of 10,000 pounds or less and 3/8-inch highest steel chains or their equivalent for tow trucks with a gross vehicle weight over 10,000 pounds. These link sizes are minimums;
 - e. Tow trucks shall have a GVWR of no less than 14,000 pounds by the manufacturer and will be equipped by the manufacturer with dual wheels and tires at each end of the rear axle;
 - f. Tow trucks shall be equipped with tow dollies as appropriate. Dollies shall meet NHTSA tread requirements;
 - g. A 10 pound BC fire extinguisher or two five pound BC fire extinguishers. All fire extinguishers shall be properly filled, operable, and located so as to be readily accessible for use. Fire extinguishers shall meet the minimum requirements of the National Fire Protection Handbook (NFPA 10 2010 edition), and shall be labeled by a national testing laboratory;
 - h. Five (5) gallons or more of a liquid absorbent such as dry sand, cat litter or a similar product;
 - i. One crowbar or wrecking bar that is not less than thirty-six (36) inches in length with a wedge head;
 - j. One broom of a type designed for pushing with an eighteen (18) inch head, and a handle of not less than thirty-six (36) inches;
 - k. One flat-edged shovel of at least nine (9) inches, with a handle of not less than thirty-six (36) inches;

- l. A box or bucket to carry glass and / or debris removed from collision scenes;
 - m. Rope or wire suitable for securing doors, hoods, trunks, etc;
 - n. A functioning spotlight or flashlight;
 - o. Outside rearview mirrors on both sides of the truck;
 - p. Emergency lights;
 - q. Three portable red emergency triangle reflectors, orange cones at least 18 inches tall, or flares;
 - r. Auxiliary tow lights;
 - s. A high mounted stop lamp shall be mounted on any tow truck if its overall width is less than 80 inches, or its GVWR is 10,000 pounds or less and is manufactured on or after September 1, 1993;
 - t. Work lights shall be wired to a separate switch and shall not be illuminated when the tow truck is in motion. These lights must be steady burning white lights that project light to the rear of the tow truck; and
 - u. Additional lighting is allowed for a stationary tow truck using equipment authorized by Texas Transportation Code Sections 545.157 and 547.305.
 - v. Any tow truck who has been issued a permit under previous ordinances, shall not be denied a renewal of their permit based solely on GVWR requirements, for a period of 5 years. Any tow truck who has been issued a permit under previous ordinances, shall be in compliance with the ordinance, including GVWR requirements, if changing companies or vehicle ownership.
2. No person shall use or operate a tow truck to tow a motor vehicle without using auxiliary tow lights unless the towed vehicle is loaded on a rollback tow truck.
 3. No person shall equip a permitted tow truck, or be in possession of; a two-way radio or scanner or any two-way radio that is capable of transmitting on any law enforcement frequency. Any operator or towing company found in possession of these devices or found transmitting on any law enforcement frequency shall be subject to suspension or revocation in accordance with Article VII.
 4. No person shall equip a permitted tow truck with any device designed to detect or monitor radar, laser, or any other speed-measuring instrument or perform a law enforcement tow using a tow truck so equipped.
 5. No person shall perform a law enforcement tow without using safety chains.
 6. No person shall use a permitted tow truck to lift more than its factory-rated lifting capacity allows.

7. No operator having an ID card shall possess or allow any prohibited weapon, firearm, illegal substance or alcoholic beverage in or around a tow truck when operating the tow truck. This provision does not prohibit a person possessing a valid license to carry (LTC) permit issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety from carrying a firearm while operating or riding in a tow truck, however the firearm shall be concealed. LTC information shall be on file with the HCSO.
8. An operator shall ensure that while lifting a motor vehicle in preparation for a law enforcement tow, all nonessential persons are a safe distance from the tow truck and motor vehicle. A safe distance is at least twice the distance between the end of the boom and the point of hook-up on the motor vehicle being winched or twice the distance the motor vehicle is being lifted, whichever is greater. If a hydraulic lift is being used, a safe distance is twice the distance to which the lift arm is extended. A tow operator is responsible for maintaining safe conditions around the tow truck during any preparation for towing and winching of the motor vehicle.
9. If a tow truck or motor vehicle to be towed is in a lane of traffic, the tow operator shall ensure that the flow of traffic is diverted. An operator shall not place or operate a tow truck cable across a lane or lanes of traffic, unless the traffic is stopped or diverted by a law enforcement officer to permit safe winching or lifting of the motor vehicle to be towed.
10. A towing company operating permitted tow trucks and tow operators of such tow trucks shall maintain and keep in good working order all safety mechanisms of the tow truck, including, but not limited to, all headlights, tail lights, turn signals, brakes, brake lights, hazard lights, flashing warning lights, windshield wipers, wiper blades, handles opening doors and windows, and tires.
11. All permitted tow trucks shall operate within the applicable recommended towed vehicle manufacturer's safety policies and procedures.
12. Each permitted tow truck shall meet the safety requirements of all other applicable statutes and this ordinance's safety requirements.
13. A tow operator shall transport a vehicle being towed, subject to a law enforcement tow from any law enforcement scene only to the location identified in the written directive for the law enforcement tow. Or, if no location is identified in the written directive, the vehicle shall be towed to either an approved VSF within the district the vehicle was towed from or a location designated by the vehicle owner or operator. However, a vehicle may be towed to a VSF if the facility is within (20) miles from the original incident scene and the vehicle storage facility is under the same ownership as the tow truck. The tow operator must complete the tow prior to participating in another match or loading any other vehicle.
14. All complaints must be sworn and submitted to the Vehicular Crimes Division. The HCSO may require complaints to be submitted through the TMS software. While anonymous complaints may be filed, they may not be investigated. Complaints that do not present sufficient allegation of ordinance violations on their face, or appear vexatious in nature may not be accepted and will be dismissed without investigation.
15. All operators must exemplify the standards of conduct listed under Texas Administrative Code, Title 16, Sections 86.711 and 86.715. An operator who is involved in or commits any act of harassment, discrimination, or intimidation of another person is subject to suspension or revocation of a permit, chip, or ID card.

B. Law Enforcement Scenes

The following rules apply to law enforcement scenes:

1. Except in an emergency or at the direction of a law enforcement officer, a tow operator shall park the tow truck at least 100 feet from a law enforcement scene or another distance at the determination of the law enforcement on scene.
2. The tow operator shall park the tow truck on the same side of the road as the damaged motor vehicle.
3. The tow operator(s) selected to tow shall remove all debris from the law enforcement scene.
4. The owner or operator of a tow truck shall not stop at the scene of a collision or near a disabled vehicle unless he or she is summoned to the scene, requested to stop, or flagged down by the owner or operator of a disabled vehicle. No soliciting will be permitted on any incident management scene in the unincorporated area of Harris County.
5. The owner of a motor vehicle or his or her representative will be allowed to determine who will remove the motor vehicle and, if any, the trailer connected to the same and the load thereon and therein to safety from a law enforcement scene, except if the owner is under arrest or the vehicle is an immediate traffic hazard. Telephone requests are not acceptable, except when an owner or representative calls the law enforcement agency involved. If this can be verified, then the owner's request by telephone will be honored. The owner-requested tow truck must be on scene or be able to arrive on scene before law enforcement is ready for the vehicles to be removed from the roadway. If the vehicle is not on a freeway/tollway and out of the roadway [in no form or fashion a traffic hazard], the owner may wait with the vehicle for the owner-requested tow truck to arrive.
6. Each tow operator must be able to show proof that the tow operator is authorized to tow a motor vehicle subject to the law enforcement tow to be stored in a vehicle storage facility issued a permit under this ordinance.
7. No person shall operate a tow truck at a law enforcement scene if not in possession of a valid permit and chip unless specifically requested to do so by the vehicle owner or operator. For consent to be valid, the vehicle owner, operator owner, or operator must be physically present at the time of the authorization.
8. All tow truck operators are required to conform to appropriate dress while at law enforcement scenes. For safety reasons, tow truck operators shall not wear muscle shirts, tank tops, or sleeveless shirts. Tow truck operators shall wear enclosed shoes or boots. If a tow truck operator chooses to wear shorts, the shorts must reach, at a minimum but may be longer than, two (2) inches above the knee when the top of the shorts are worn at the waist.
9. All tow trucks are subject to an inspection by a HCSO VCD supervisor with the rank of sergeant or above or by HCSO personnel designated as tow truck inspectors or a HCSO designee.
10. Operators shall obey all federal, state, and county laws and ordinances. Violators are subject to arrest, as well as the suspension or revocation of any permit and / or ID card.

11. Once a motor vehicle has been fully hooked up and a law enforcement tow has been initiated, the towing company may charge only as authorized by this ordinance for the tow.
12. Only tow truck operators with a permit, chip, and ID card shall be allowed to match or otherwise load a vehicle for a law enforcement tow. This section does not apply to a government-owned tow truck.
13. When required by a law enforcement officer at a law enforcement scene, an operator shall present an ID card, tow truck permit, and chip. Law enforcement officers may inspect the ID card of any operator or tow truck for violations of this ordinance at any law enforcement scene.
14. No tow truck operator shall remove any vehicle that is involved in a law enforcement scene and requires towing or attach the tow truck to such a vehicle until a law enforcement officer responsible for the law enforcement scene authorizes the moving of the vehicle.
15. The fact that no law enforcement officer is present at a law enforcement scene when a tow truck arrives shall not constitute an exception to this section. It shall be the duty of any vehicle operator or operator desiring to tow or haul any vehicle from the law enforcement scene to cause the Harris County Sheriff's Office to be notified and to await the arrival of a law enforcement officer and the completion of his or her investigation.
16. Law enforcement officers shall allow any vehicle operator present at a law enforcement scene, who is able and willing, a reasonable amount of time to arrange a consent tow with a tow truck operator of their choice. This consideration will take into account the vehicle's location, its potential to obstruct traffic, current traffic conditions, weather, lighting, safety conditions, and other relevant traffic management factors. If the vehicle operator is not present, or is unable or unwilling to make arrangements for the vehicle's removal within a reasonable time, the investigating law enforcement officer will issue the necessary orders for the vehicle to be removed through a law enforcement-authorized tow.
17. The provisions of this section shall not apply to vehicles held for law enforcement investigation or other purposes as authorized by state and federal law, which may be removed by law enforcement tow trucks or as otherwise directed by the law enforcement officer in charge of the police scene or tows on freeways.
18. All tow truck operators at a police scene shall obey all lawful orders given them by any law enforcement officer investigating such scene and shall not in any manner knowingly or intentionally interfere with such law enforcement officer in the performance of the officer's duties.
19. Towing operators must wear a reflective vest, shirt, or reflective jacket at all times while working outside the tow truck. The reflective vest, shirt, or reflective jacket must meet the ANSI/ISEA requirements for high visibility safety apparel.
20. The HCSO may, in its discretion, require tow operators to provide vehicle operators with documentation, including, but not limited to, a Motorist Bill of Rights.

C. Evidentiary Crime Scenes

Law enforcement tows from evidentiary crime scenes shall be subject to the following provisions, which shall prevail over all other conflicting law enforcement scene and matching regulations:

1. A law enforcement officer assigned to a specialized investigative division within a law enforcement agency is authorized to make a determination that a contract tow truck or a tow truck selected through the match process may tow a motor vehicle to a specific location for additional evidentiary processing.
2. Once the additional evidentiary processing has been completed, the vehicle shall be removed by the tow truck that conducted the initial tow to the vehicle storage facility named in the written directive for the law enforcement tow, if selected through the match process. Otherwise, the law enforcement agency that authorized the tow is required to use its contract tow truck.
3. A towing company that performs law enforcement tows under this section, whether selected through a match under this ordinance or by contract with a law enforcement agency, must possess a valid permit under this ordinance.
4. A law enforcement tow under this section shall not be subject to a fee that exceeds those authorized under this ordinance.

D. Matching

The following rules apply to the matching of a permitted tow truck at law enforcement and evidentiary crime scenes.

1. The officer shall allow each authorized operator to participate in a match as described below. Only three tow trucks will be allowed on the scene. The investigating officer may request additional tow trucks if there are more than three (3) disabled vehicles.
2. If only one tow truck is present at a law enforcement scene when a law enforcement officer arrives, a match as described above is not required and the law enforcement officer shall authorize that tow truck to load the vehicle.
3. If two (2) or more tow trucks are present at the time a law enforcement officer arrives, then a match is required. If a tow truck calls in a vehicle to be checked that appears to be stolen or abandoned and the motor vehicle is to be loaded at the law enforcement officer's request, then that tow truck will tow the motor vehicle. If no tow truck is present at the law enforcement scene, then the law enforcement officer will broadcast for a tow truck. Upon the arrival of the first tow truck, the law enforcement officer will broadcast "No more wreckers," and all other tow trucks will be disregarded.
4. Only tow trucks possessing a HCSO issued permit and chip will be allowed to participate in the match.
5. Any tow truck operator or towing company that interferes with the loading of a motor vehicle by another operator or towing company commits a violation of this ordinance.
6. On arrival, if the law enforcement officer determines there is a sufficient amount of tow trucks, the officer may broadcast "No more wreckers." After the broadcast, no additional tow trucks shall arrive on scene.
7. When conducting a match, the law enforcement officer or the officer's designee will collect from each operator his metal numbered chip and deposit it in a hat or other similar container. After doing so, the law enforcement officer or other person designated by the law enforcement

officer will draw a chip. If a tow truck operator's chip is drawn, he or she may then load the motor vehicle. If a tow truck operator is matched but refuses, or cannot perform the tow, the tow truck operator shall inform the officer or officer's designee that the tow operator is unable to or is unwilling to perform the tow. The officer or the officer's designee shall conduct another match. A tow operator may not under any circumstances assign the tow to another tow operator. In the event of an assignment in violation of this section, both the tow operator who attempted to assign the tow and the tow operator who attempted to receive the tow shall be in violation of this ordinance and subject to penalty at the discretion of the HCSO.

E. Denial, Refusal to Renew, Suspension, or Revocation

The HCSO may deny, refuse to renew, suspend, or revoke an ID card or permit for violations under this article in accordance with Article VII.

F. Non-Consent Tows

Tow truck operators conducting Non-Consent Tows such as Private Property Tows and/or Repossessions shall enter the tow information data into the TMS software application for reporting purposes. To report these instances, visit the Towing and Storage Unit links at: HarrisCountySO.org.

V. HEAVY-DUTY TOW TRUCKS

A. Permit Required

No person shall operate a heavy-duty tow truck to perform a law enforcement tow without a heavy-duty tow truck permit issued under this ordinance unless that person is operating pursuant to a contract with the county for such services, in which case services will be pursuant to the contract rather than this regulation.

B. Application Process

1. Each person or towing company that desires authorization to operate a heavy-duty tow truck to perform law enforcement tows shall file an application. An electronic application may be required by the HCSO through the TMS software application. The application shall state the following:
 - a. Year and make of the tow truck to which permit will apply;
 - b. Vehicle identification number of the tow truck;
 - c. Current Texas permit plate number for the tow truck; and
 - d. Name, address, and telephone number of the tow truck owner.
2. The application form shall be accompanied by:
 - a. Copy of "Tow Truck Cab Card" issued by TDLR for the tow truck to be permitted;
 - b. Receipt from the Harris County Tax Office showing current registration, or if registered outside Harris County, the current registration from the county where the tow truck is located;
 - c. Proof of passage of designated inspection;

- d. Copy of the towing company's most recent tow truck invoice;
- e. Current original business card for the towing company which shall include the business name, business phone number, and all addresses and phone numbers of storage lots to be used by the towing company; and
- f. Original "Certificate Of Insurance" for the tow truck being permitted with the certificate holder named as follows:

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
ATTN: VCD /Towing and Storage Unit
4101 Interwood North Parkway, Suite 200
Houston, Texas 77032

C. Application Fee

An applicant for a tow truck permit and chip shall not be required to pay a fee to submit an application, but no permit shall go into effect until a permit fee as provided in Article VIII is paid.

D. HCSO Dispatch of Heavy Duty Tow Trucks

- 1. Heavy-duty tow trucks will be dispatched through Harris County Communications Divisions based on the list and information provided from the Tow Truck Inspector.
- 2. If a law enforcement officer determines at the law enforcement scene that the owner / operator does not have a heavy-duty tow truck that can arrive within 45 minutes, the officer may request that another heavy-duty tow truck be dispatched.
- 3. Law enforcement may only utilize those heavy-duty tow trucks on its official list which will be submitted to the all Harris County Communications Divisions and kept updated by the Tow Truck Inspector(s). Once the approved heavy-duty tow truck accepts the tow from one of the Harris County Communication Divisions, no other heavy-duty tow trucks will be allowed to load the vehicle the heavy-duty was dispatched to tow.
- 4. Failure of the heavy-duty tow truck to arrive within 45 minutes of accepting the tow from the one of the Harris County Communication Divisions is a violation of this ordinance.
- 5. This ordinance does not regulate any separate fee for cargo salvage that is negotiated between the operator and motor vehicle owner.

E. Requirements

No person shall operate a heavy-duty tow truck to perform law enforcement tows unless it meets the following requirements:

- 1. A heavy-duty tow truck shall be at least a five-ton vehicle or more and shall be equipped with air brakes and tandem axles.
- 2. Heavy-duty tow trucks shall have a 24-hour telephone service and be equipped with two-way radio communication with a 24-hour dispatch service.
- 3. The heavy-duty tow truck shall have a TDLR approved extendable boom and have at least a tandem axle. An acceptable heavy-duty tow truck shall have a minimum boom manufacturer rating of 30 tons. Each heavy duty tow truck shall have a minimum of two winches with a

minimum rating of 30,000 pound manufacturer rating with a minimum of 200 feet of ¾ inch diameter (or larger) wire rope. The end of each rope shall be swaged.

F. Denial, Refusal to Renew, Suspension, or Revocation

The HCSO, at its sole discretion, may deny, refuse to renew, suspend or revoke a heavy-duty tow truck permit issued under this ordinance according to Article VII.

VI. VEHICLE STORAGE FACILITIES (VSF)

A. Permit Required

1. No person shall store or allow a motor vehicle subject to a law enforcement tow to be stored on their property without a valid Vehicle Storage Facility (VSF) permit issued by the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) and the applicable state agency under the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act except as permitted by an agreement with the vehicle's operator or as specifically allowed by this ordinance, and subject to the affirmative defenses outlined in this ordinance.
2. A permit to operate a VSF issued by the HCSO is valid only for the physical location indicated on the permit.
3. A permit to operate a VSF is nontransferable and not assignable.
4. No person shall transport a motor vehicle from a law enforcement scene to a VSF without a valid permit issued under this ordinance, unless authorized to do so by the operator of the motor vehicle towed and otherwise allowed by this ordinance.
5. A permitted VSF must have all of the required permits displayed, as required by various county and / or state entities.

B. Application Process

1. Each storage company shall operate its VSF to meet all requirements of the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and be licensed pursuant to the statutes to store towed motor vehicles. Each storage company shall file a certificate with the HCSO stating it has met the following requirements:
 - a. The storage company is currently licensed under the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act.
 - b. The storage company agrees not to charge fees in excess of the maximum charges set in accordance with the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and Article VIII of this ordinance.
 - c. A corporation's application shall be signed and sworn to by its president and secretary.
2. To obtain a permit under this ordinance to operate a private VSF, a person or storage company shall file an application. The HCSO may require an electronic application be completed through the TMS software application.
3. An application shall include the following information:
 - a. A list of all felony convictions and misdemeanor convictions for which the maximum punishment is confinement in jail or a fine exceeding \$200 dollars obtained against the

applicant, a partner, a principal, or the general manager or corporate officer of the applicant during the ten (10) years immediately preceding the date of the application;

- b. If the applicant is a partnership, the name and address of each partner;
 - c. If the applicant is a corporation, the name and address of each corporate officer;
 - d. The names of all owners and the percentage of ownership interest each holds in the facility;
 - e. The name of the facility operator / manager if not one of the owners;
 - f. The facility's physical address, mailing address, and all telephone numbers;
 - g. The facility's storage capacity;
 - h. Whether or not the facility is fenced, and if so, the height of the fence and the date it was installed;
 - i. Whether or not the facility has an all-weather surface;
 - j. Whether or not the facility has signs posted in the proper locations; and
 - k. Whether or not the facility has the required lighting.
4. The HCSO or its designee(s) shall inspect each VSF for which an initial application is filed and which inspection is included in the application fee. The HCSO may further deny or refuse to renew the application for any facility that does not satisfy this section's requirements upon a physical inspection.
5. If an application is denied or its renewal refused, or if a permit is suspended or revoked, and the HCSO must conduct a subsequent inspection to verify that there are no existing violations, the HCSO will charge an additional inspection fee as provided in Article VIII.

C. Application Fee

An applicant for a VSF permit shall not be required to pay a fee to submit an application, but no permit shall go into effect until a permit fee as provided in Article VIII is paid.

D. Expiration

- 1. Each VSF permit issued by the HCSO expires annually on November 30th at 11:59 pm.
- 2. The owner of a VSF may renew its permit by filing a renewal application between October 1st and October 15th each year. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the approved TMS software application.
- 3. If a renewal application is submitted after the date of expiration, the permit shall not be renewed. However, a new application may be filed the following year.
- 4. If the permit of a person, partnership, or corporation expires, he or she shall apply for a new permit if the vehicle storage facility is still in business.

E. Insurance

1. Each applicant shall obtain a certificate of insurance that shall be given to the HCSO. The certificate must be for legal liability insurance for the vehicle storage facility in the amounts specified in this ordinance.
2. No insurance policy or certificate of insurance will be accepted unless issued by an insurance company licensed and authorized to do business in this state in the form prescribed or approved by the State Board of Insurance and signed and countersigned by an authorized agent of the insurance company.
3. A VSF shall have insurance coverage in one of the following amounts:
 - a. If it has space to store not more than 50 motor vehicles, then not less than \$9,000 coverage for injury to or destruction of property of others;
 - b. If it has space to store 51 to 99 motor vehicles, then not less than \$18,000 coverage; or
 - c. If it has space to store 100 or more motor vehicles, then not less than \$25,000 coverage.
4. The VSF's insurance policy shall provide that the insurance company will give the HCSO 30 calendar days' written notice prior to the cancellation or expiration of any policy.
5. The VSF shall keep its insurance policy in full force and effect so long as the facility maintains a permit under this ordinance.

F. Notice to Registered Owner by Storage Lot Operator Pursuant to a Law Enforcement Tow

1. The VSF shall send written notice to the towed vehicle's registered owner and primary lienholder, not earlier than 24 hours but not later than five calendar (5) days after the date the vehicle is received. The storage facility operator may charge for sending the required notice in an amount authorized by Article VIII.
2. The notice shall be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, and shall contain:
 - a. The date the vehicle was accepted for storage;
 - b. The first day for which a daily storage fee is assessed;
 - c. The daily storage rate;
 - d. The type and amount of all other charges to be paid when the vehicle is claimed;
 - e. The full name, street address, and telephone number of the facility;
 - f. The hours during which the owner may claim the vehicle; and
 - g. The VSF permit number.

G. Storage Lot Operational Rules and Regulations

1. Each storage company shall have an attendant on duty at the vehicle storage facility between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday (holidays excluded) and be available to release vehicles at other times within one hour after notification.

2. A storage company that accepts a private property or law enforcement tow shall enter or verify that the vehicle information is entered into the TMS within 2 hours. If the TMS is not available the VSF shall notify the HCSO within two hours of accepting the vehicle but will be responsible for entry into the TMS when it becomes available. The tow truck ticket shall indicate the time of notice and the name of the person at the HCSO that it notified. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the TMS software application.
3. At a law enforcement officer's request, a VSF shall accept any motor vehicle, including, but not limited to, a burned vehicle, a boat, and a recreational vehicle, or part thereof that was towed from within the unincorporated areas of Harris County.
4. A towing company and / or storage company shall not dispose of any motor vehicle towed at the request of a law enforcement officer and subsequently abandoned at the VSF unless it is sold through a public auction. (see Texas Transportation Code Chapter 683).
5. No person shall allow or accept a motor vehicle subject to a law enforcement tow to be stored at a vehicle storage facility other than at the VSF identified in the written directive. If a VSF is not identified in the written directive, a vehicle shall be towed to a location designated by the vehicle's owner or operator or to an approved VSF within the district. .
6. Each VSF shall post at each VSF it owns or operates a sign that is plainly visible to the public at all times. The sign shall clearly display the VSF permit number, hours of operation, maximum charges allowed, and who to contact about complaints.
7. Each VSF must accept the following forms of payment: cash, debit card, and credit card.
8. Each VSF shall post at each storage location it owns or operates a sign that is plainly visible to the public at all times which shall display:

“This Vehicle Storage Facility MUST accept payment by Cash, Debit Card, and Credit Card for any and all fees or charges associated with delivery or storage of a vehicle.”
9. A VSF shall not charge an impoundment fee to secure a stored motor vehicle subject to a law enforcement tow unless it does the following:
 - a. The VSF conducts a written inventory of any unsecured personal property contained in the vehicle;
 - b. The VSF removes and stores all property for which safekeeping is necessary and specifies such removal and storage on the written inventory;
 - c. The VSF obtains from a state or county agency the motor vehicle's registration information;
 - d. If doors or windows of a stored vehicle are broken or inoperative, the VSF uses materials such as plastic or canvas tarpaulins to properly protect the vehicle; and
 - e. The VSF provides a written bill for services describing with specificity the exact conduct and date(s) when the services were performed for which the impoundment fee is assessed.

10. A VSF shall allow owners or operator of stored motor vehicles to remove personal property prior to payment of any fees. The vehicle storage facility shall keep a signed receipt for all personal items released.

H. Duties and Responsibilities

1. All vehicles stored after a law enforcement tow shall, at all times, be kept inside the fenced or enclosed area of the vehicle storage facility. For purposes of this subsection, enclosed area shall include the inside of a building. A vehicle accepted for storage shall be secured to prevent theft of the vehicle or its contents, including but not limited to locking doors, closing windows and hatchbacks, and raising or covering convertible tops.
2. Except as otherwise provided in this ordinance, no person shall remove or allow the removal of any parts from any vehicle, and no vehicle shall be dismantled or demolished within the storage area of a vehicle storage facility. Vehicles may be dismantled or demolished only if the storage lot has a certificate of title, certificate of authority to demolish, police auction sales receipt, or transfer document issued by the State of Texas for the vehicle being dismantled or demolished.
3. No person other than the owner of a motor vehicle shall use or allow others to use any stored motor vehicle for any purpose.
4. No person shall repair, alter, or have parts removed from or replaced in a stored motor vehicle without the written consent of the owner or the owner's authorized representative.
5. VSF operators shall follow and maintain lots in accordance with Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and regulations issued thereunder.
6. The VSF shall keep and maintain records of all motor vehicles received by law enforcement tows in a manner and form approved by the HCSO.
7. VSFs will utilize the TMS to manage the vehicle inventory for tows requested by the HCSO. VSFs will record vehicle information, including license plate and VIN, and any other fields prescribed by the HCSO.
8. VSFs will report the abandonment of the motor vehicle to the HCSO and pay a \$10 fee to be used by the HCSO for the cost of the notice required by TRC Chapter 683.
9. VSFs will enter an itemized list of all fees related to the towing and storage of the vehicle into the TMS.
10. Upon vehicle release to the registered owner or other authorized party, the VSF will record who the vehicle is being released to, payment method and amount collected for the release. The VSF will generate a receipt through the TMS as part of the release process.
11. The VSF will document via the TMS access pass feature any HCSO staff who requests and is allowed access to a vehicle towed at the direction of the HCSO.
12. Unclaimed or otherwise abandoned vehicles will be made available through the TMS to support auction processing performed by the HCSO.

13. All Law Enforcement tows from unincorporated Harris County shall be included on the 7-day lists reported to the HCSO to include law enforcement tows from outside agencies, in unincorporated Harris County.
14. A VSF may not request or solicit a vehicle owner or operator to sign an authorization form for a tow, repair, or any other service if the storage of the vehicle is the result of a tow initiated by law enforcement. (Ref. Texas Admin. Code 85.708)

I. Allowable Fees

A VSF that has been issued a permit under this ordinance may charge only fees authorized under the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and regulations issued thereunder.

1. Law Enforcement Administrative Fee

When a towing company transports a vehicle to a VSF from a Law Enforcement scene, the VSF shall collect from the vehicle owner a Law Enforcement Administrative Fee of seven dollars (\$7.00), plus all applicable sales tax, in addition to the authorized Harris County tow rate. The fee shall be collected before releasing a vehicle unless an exemption described in this ordinance or state law applies. The VSF shall remit the seven dollars (\$7.00) plus the applicable sales tax to the TMC within the first seven (7) days of the following month, through ACH.

J. Denial, Refusal to Renew, Suspension, or Revocation

The HCSO, may deny, refuse to renew, suspend or revoke a vehicle storage facility permit issued under this ordinance according to Article VII.

VII. DENIAL, REFUSAL TO RENEW, SUSPENSION, NOTIFICATIONS OF COMPLAINT, OR REVOCATION OF PERMITS AND ID CARDS

A. Denial or Refusal to Renew Permit and ID Card

1. The HCSO shall deny or refuse to renew, any permit or ID card issued under this ordinance for any of the following reasons:
 - a. The applicant knowingly supplied false or incomplete information on the application;
 - b. The applicant is under indictment for a felony or has a felony conviction within the last five (5) years from the date of the application, or is on community supervision or deferred adjudication for a felony. If the conviction is on appeal, the period of appeal is considered a conviction for purposes of this ordinance;
 - c. The applicant has been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude within the last ten (10) years from the date of the last application. If the conviction is on appeal, the period of appeal is considered a conviction for purposes of this ordinance;
 - d. The applicant has had his or her permit or ID card revoked within the last three (3) years for a violation of this ordinance; or
 - e. If the applicant has been convicted under any section of Chapter 21 of the Texas Penal Code, or is required to be registered as a sex offender under Chapter 62 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, the HCSO shall deny the application; or
 - f. If the applicant has a pending case involving moral turpitude classified as Class B misdemeanor or higher, the HCSO may temporarily deny on a case-by-case basis.

2. The HCSO may also revoke or suspend an ID card or permit for any reason listed in VII.A.1 or for any of the following reasons:
 - a. Violation of this ordinance;
 - b. Violation of federal, state, or county laws classified as Class B misdemeanors or higher;
 - c. Suspension of Texas operator's license;
 - d. Falsifying records;
 - e. Charging an amount that exceeds the amounts authorized under Article VIII;
 - f. Performing or attempting to perform a law enforcement tow without authorization;
 - g. Towing a motor vehicle that is reported stolen without first contacting a law enforcement agency prior to the tow;
 - h. Filing complaints deemed by the HCSO to be untrue, vexatious or excessive.
3. If a company or any of its employees receive more than three violations within a 2-year period, the company's license may be revoked.
4. An operator complaining of another operator, permit holder or law enforcement officer may file a complaint with the HCSO Vehicular Crimes Division. Complaints against law enforcement officers will be referred to the appropriate law enforcement agency for their disposition. If an appropriate referral is not made, the HCSO shall investigate the complaint and take any action it deems appropriate and authorized under this ordinance. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the TMS software application.
5. A Vehicular Crimes Division supervisor with the rank of sergeant or above or personnel designated by the HCSO VCD Commander shall have the authority to deny, refuse to renew, suspend or revoke any ID card or permit issued under this ordinance.
6. When the HCSO becomes aware of a towing company or operator who has engaged in behavior that is considered unethical but does not violate the regulations under a law enforcement tow, the HCSO will take the following action.
 - a. 1st violation: written notice and placement of the notice in the company's and operator's files.
 - b. 2nd violation: written notice and request a written statement from the company and operator. Notice and written statements will be placed in the company's and operator's files.
 - c. 3rd violation: written notice informing the company and operator that a request will be sent to the County Attorney's Office, asking for the government granted permit or license to be revoked.

B. Notice of Adverse Action by the HCSO

1. If the HCSO denies an Application ID card or permit allowed under this ordinance, it attempt send the applicant a written notice that sets forth the following:
 - a. The specific grounds for the HCSO’s adverse action; and / or
 - b. Any specific violations of this ordinance and / or any federal or state laws that the HCSO relied on in its adverse action.
 - c. The HCSO shall send notice by first class mail through the United States Postal Service. The HCSO may require this process to be completed through the TMS software application.
2. If the HCSO refuses to renew, or suspends or revokes any ID card or permit under this ordinance, it may do so by collecting or removing HCSO property, and otherwise disregarding the person or company at a match.
3. Upon a refusal to renew, or a suspension or revocation, a VCD supervisor or personnel designated as tow truck inspector shall take possession of a permit, chip and / or ID card pending any investigation or appeal. The person or company possessing the chip, permit, and / or ID card shall deliver them to the HCSO tow truck inspector the NEXT working day along with a “voluntary explanation of the incident.” Law enforcement officers from other agencies, upon determination of a violation of this ordinance, shall have the authority to order a tow truck operator not to load a vehicle.
4. Adverse action periods may not be enforced until after the Hearing Process has concluded or forfeited under VII C (7) of this ordinance.

C. Hearing Process

1. A person or company may not appeal the HCSO’s adverse action if the adverse action, as defined in Section VII(B), was based on Section VII(A)(1)(a)(b)(c)(e) or Section VII(A)(2)(c). The VCD Commander may review the adverse action by providing written notice with supporting documents to the address for sending notice of appeals herein. In the case that the adverse action was taken by the HCSO Incident Management Unit (IMU), for violations under Section X of this ordinance, then the adverse action may be reviewed by the IMU Commander. A person or company may appeal the HCSO’s adverse action by using the following procedures:
 2. If an application is denied or its renewal refused, by delivering a written notice of appeal within five (5) working days from the date the HCSO informs an applicant or permit holder.
 3. If an ID card or permit is suspended or revoked, an appeal may be delivered in writing within five (5) working days from the notification date of the HCSO’s adverse action.
 4. Delivery of a notice of appeal to the HCSO is effective if hand-delivered or delivered by United States First Class Mail, Return Receipt Requested, to the division commander of the deputy who issued the adverse action.
 5. Upon receipt of a notice of appeal, the watch commander shall convene a disciplinary hearing committee consisting of the following members:

- a. VCD or IMU supervisor or his or her designee;
 - b. Lieutenant of the district in which the violation occurred; and
 - c. Any other patrol supervisor designated by the watch commander.
6. The disciplinary hearing committee shall give the person or company making the appeal notice stating the date, time and place of the appeal hearing. The person or company that requested the appeal and the committee are entitled to offer evidence and argument on its behalf. The committee shall hold a hearing and render a decision no later than fifteen (15) working days from receipt of the written notice of appeal. The person or company may appeal to the division commander of the deputy which issued the adverse action. During the hearing, the adverse action can be lifted, sustained, or enhanced at the discretion of the Division Commander. The VCD or IMU Division Commander's review shall be final.
 7. A person or company forfeits an appeal by failing to file an appeal within five (5) business days under this article. The HCSO is not required to hold a hearing or render any further decisions.
 8. If the adverse action was taken by the VCD Towing and Storage unit, notices of appeal shall be sent to:

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
ATTN: VCD /Towing and Storage Unit
4101 Interwood North Parkway, Suite 200
Houston, Texas 77032
 9. If the adverse action was taken by the IMU Tow and Go unit, notices of appeal shall be sent to:

HOUSTON TRANSTAR
ATTN: Harris County Sheriff's Office – Tow and Go
6922 Katy Road
Houston, Texas 77024

D. Sanctions; Reinstatement

1. The disciplinary hearing committee may continue the suspension of an ID card or any permit for an additional period not less than seven (7) working days nor more than 90 working days from the date the decision on an appeal is rendered and require the payment of a reinstatement fee as provided in Article VIII. A person or company subject to a denial or refusal to renew an application or revocation of an ID card(s) or permit issued under this ordinance may submit a new application with the HCSO together with the fees as provided in Article VIII as follows:
 - a. 180 or more working days after the date of the disciplinary hearing committee's final decision; or
 - b. 90 or more working days after the date of a final decision by the disciplinary hearing committee, and the additional payment of a reinstatement fee as provided in Article VIII.
2. As a further condition of renewal or the cancellation of a suspension or revocation, the disciplinary hearing committee may require the submission of a new application and payment of the appropriate fees under Article VIII.

3. Suspension of an ID card or permit shall be for a period not less than seven (7) calendar days nor more than 90 calendar days.

E. Affirmative Defenses to Suspension or Revocation

It is an affirmative defense to suspension or revocation that:

1. The tow truck used to tow the vehicle was owned by the owner of the vehicle being towed, carried or otherwise transported by the tow truck;
2. The vehicle towed, carried, or otherwise transported was originally picked up or loaded onto the tow truck at a specific location not within the unincorporated areas of Harris County, that was not a law enforcement scene, or that was not a public road;
3. The motor vehicle was not being towed pursuant to a law enforcement tow;
4. The towing was incidental to a lawful repossession of the towed motor vehicle;
5. The tow truck operator complied with all the requirements of this ordinance that would be applicable if the lienholder were the owner of the vehicle being towed;
6. In the instance of a vehicle storage facility, that the motor vehicle being stored was not towed to the location; or
7. The operator, towing company, or vehicle storage facility involved was not at the time of the offense required to be permitted under this ordinance.

VIII. FEES AND CHARGES

TOW TRUCK FEES AND TOWED VEHICLE CHARGES

A	Application Fees (see note 1)	
	1. Tow Truck and Heavy Duty Truck	No Charge
	2. Storage Lot – Per Lot (includes one inspection)	No Charge
B	New License Fees (see note 1)	
	ID Card	\$15.00
C	New Permit Fees (see note 1)	
	Tow Truck	\$628.00
	Heavy Duty Tow Truck	\$628.00
	Storage Lot Permit	\$230.00
	Additional Storage Lot Inspection	\$200.00
	Additional Tow Truck Inspection	\$75.00
D	Renewal, Replacement, and Reinstatement Fees (see note 1)	
	1. ID Card	
	Replacement	\$15.00
	Renewal	\$15.00
	Reinstatement	\$15.00
	2. Tow Truck Permit	
	Replacement	\$60.00
	Renewal	\$580.00
	Reinstatement	\$580.00
	3. Heavy Duty Tow Truck Permit	
	Replacement	\$60.00
	Renewal	\$580.00
	Reinstatement	\$580.00
	4. Vehicle Storage Facility Permit	
	Replacement	\$30.00
	Renewal – Per Lot (includes one inspection)	\$230.00
	Reinstatement – Per Lot (includes one inspection)	\$580.00
	5. Chip	
	Initial	No Charge
	Replacement	\$60.00
E	Law Enforcement Tow Maximum Charges (see note 2)	
	Tow Truck	(see note 3)
	Heavy Duty Tow Truck	
	1. First Two Hours	(see note 3)
	2. Each Additional Hour	(see note 3)
F	Vehicle Storage Facility Maximum Charges (see note 3)	
	1. Storage Fee	
	a. Vehicle Length no more than 25 feet	(see note 4)
	b. Vehicle Length more than 25 feet	(see note 4)
	2. Impoundment Fee	(see note 4)
	3. Notification Charges (after 24 hours)	(see note 4)
	4. Law Enforcement Administrative fee (see note 5)	\$7.00 plus applicable tax
	5. Abandonment Notification Fee per vehicle TRC 683.031	\$10.00

Notes:

- (1) Unless otherwise indicated, all fees are nonrefundable. If any permit is for less than 12 months, the Permit fee must be paid in full. Any portion of the year shall be deemed an entire year.
- (2) Permit Holders, operators, owners, and companies shall not charge any additional charges other than those provided under this article.
- (3) See Separate Commissioners Court order regarding non-consent and private property tow charges.

- (4) The amounts set by the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and Regulations issued thereunder. NC: no charge. Included in cost of permit.
- (5) 16 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 85 (85.722) (f) Per vehicle towed from a Law Enforcement Scene towed to a VSF.

No Additional Fees

Permit holders, operators, owners, and companies shall not charge any fees for law enforcement tows and storage of vehicles towed without consent and subject to this ordinance other than those fees provided under this ordinance.

IX. REVISION OF TOW RATES

The county has provided separately for tow rate studies in regard to revising the rates for non-consent tows. Towing companies holding permits under this ordinance shall cooperate in all tow studies conducted by the county. Willful failure to cooperate with tow rate studies shall be grounds for possible suspension or revocation of a permit under this ordinance or for failure to grant an application for a permit.

X. FREEWAY TOWING PROGRAMS AND CONTRACTS

A. Applicability

In the event Commissioners Court approves and maintains an active program for freeway towing, this article shall apply. This article applies only to the segments of freeway designated in agreements entered into in accordance with these regulations and for the furtherance of the program established by Commissioners Court for freeway towing. Article IV.B. provides the default provisions for towing under this article. However, in the event of a conflict between the requirements of this article and Article IV.B, this article shall control.

B. Wrecked or Stalled Vehicle; Traffic Hazard

A wrecked or stalled vehicle on a freeway is a traffic hazard and a threat to public safety. Wrecked vehicles, regardless of location, or stalled vehicles in a moving lane shall be removed from a freeway at the earliest possible opportunity consistent with safety and proper law enforcement procedures. A wrecked or stalled vehicle on a freeway shall constitute a law enforcement scene. Stalled vehicles on a shoulder shall be removed as directed by a law enforcement officer.

1. Abandoned or inoperable vehicles on the shoulder (with no portion in the moving lane of traffic) within a Tow and Go segment can be towed (at the standard Tow and Go rate) with all of the following completed.
 - a. Law enforcement shall make the location and provide authorization (a report shall be generated by the law enforcement agency)
 - b. Law enforcement shall conduct an inventory of the vehicle prior to towing (or follow the vehicle off the roadway to complete the inventory if it is unsafe to complete the inventory on the roadway shoulder).
 - c. Law enforcement shall notify the HCSO message center of the tow and the storage location prior to leaving the scene.
 - d. Incident Management Unit (IMU) shall be notified, and a Regional Incident Management (RIM) System number generated.

2. An abandoned vehicle will be stored for 48 hours at no cost to the vehicle owner. If the vehicle owner fails to collect his or her vehicle within the 48 hours, the storage fees will start at the time the vehicle arrived at the storage lot, and the first 48 hours will no longer be waived.
 - a. The storage lot will send a certified letter to the registered owner at the time of receiving the abandoned vehicle. The storage lot shall also attempt to contact the registered owner by phone if a number can be located.
 - b. At no time will the owner of the vehicle be charged for the tow service (the tow service is covered and paid for under the Tow and Go program, at the current standard rate).

C. Persons Authorized

A wrecked or stalled vehicle may be towed from a freeway by a tow truck operated by:

1. A tow truck operator holding a contract to conduct freeway towing under Article X of this ordinance;
2. Any tow operator called to a scene on a freeway by a law enforcement officer; or
3. A tow truck operator called by the vehicle owner or operator of a wrecked or stalled vehicle who arrives at the location of such vehicle before the law enforcement officer in charge of the scene directs the removal of the vehicle. This includes, but not limited to, a tow truck operated by an automobile club, insurance company, or other person having a contractual obligation to provide the vehicle owner with towing services.

D. Violations

Except as provided in item (3) of subsection (C) of this section, it shall be a violation of this ordinance for any tow truck not operated pursuant to items (1) or (2) of subsection (C) of this section to be present or remain at, or to tow any vehicle from, a freeway. It shall also be a violation of this section for a tow operator to solicit the business of towing at a law enforcement scene. Violators will be subject to suspension or revocation of their ID or permit at the discretion of the HCSO. It shall be an affirmative defense that (i) the tow truck operator was acting under the direction of a law enforcement officer, or (ii) the tow truck is a heavy-duty tow truck summoned to the scene by a law enforcement officer pursuant to Article V, Section D, of these regulations.

E. Motorist Guidelines

The tow operator shall provide the operator of the vehicle with the “Tow and Go Motorist Guidelines” handout.

https://www.towandgo.com/content/documents/tow-and-go/T_G_Motorist_Guidelines_Handout.pdf).

F. Drug Testing

Tow operators under freeway towing contracts will be subject to random drug testing. Any tow operator who fails the drug test is subject to suspension or revocation of his or her license, ID, or permit, at the discretion of the HCSO.

G. Rates

Tow operators shall perform freeway tows in accordance with these regulations at the Tow and Go current authorized rate. Storage fees for vehicles towed under the freeway towing program adopted by Commissioners Court will not be assessed for the first 48 hours the vehicle is stored. Abandoned

vehicles and law enforcement tows not conducted through the freeway towing program will be at the current county rate approved by the Commissioners Court.

H. Permitted Riders

With the exception of the driver or passenger(s) of the towed vehicle, only persons holding a license under these provisions may ride in the cab of a tow truck performing law enforcement tows.

I. Obedience to Law Enforcement

1. All tow truck operators at a law enforcement scene shall obey all lawful orders given them by any law enforcement officer investigating such scene and shall not in any manner knowingly or intentionally interfere with such law enforcement officer in the performance of his or her duty.
2. A tow truck operator may not remove a vehicle from a law enforcement scene without permission from the officer in charge of the scene.

J. Towing Agreements

The County Judge, upon approval of the Commissioners Court or the Harris County Purchasing Agent (“Purchasing Agent”), as applicable, may execute non-exclusive agreements on behalf of the county for purposes of establishing and maintaining the county’s freeway towing program (“Program”). The county’s participation in the program and the agreements executed in accordance with this regulation are conditioned upon the county receiving adequate funding from the Houston Galveston Area Council (“HGAC”) to support the program unless the Harris County Commissioners Court authorizes funds for all costs associated with the program. Such agreements shall provide, without limitation, the following:

1. That the tow operator shall remove wrecked or stalled vehicles from a designated segment of a freeway on a 24-hour basis and shall respond to the scene within the time designated in the agreement;
2. That the tow operator shall perform non-consent tows from a freeway and remove all such vehicles to a safe place within the zone. The current rate for such services shall correspond to current Harris County rates. In the event that HGAC ceases funding to the program and the Commissioners Court authorizes funds, the rate shall be determined by the Harris County Budget Management Department;
3. That the tow operator shall remove to the nearest place of safety a wrecked vehicle, regardless of location, or a stalled vehicle in a moving lane. The current rate for such services shall correspond to current Harris County rates and be adjusted based on the Consumer Price Index. In the event that HGAC ceases funding to the program and the Commissioners Court authorizes funds, the rate shall be determined by the Harris County Budget Management Department;
4. That the tow operator shall tow a stalled vehicle located on the freeway system to a safe place off the freeway within one mile from the nearest freeway exit at the rate prescribed and subject to the conditions established in the agreement. If no safe place can be agreed upon, the motorist will have the option to have the vehicle towed to the nearest storage lot. Storage will not be assessed for the first 48 hours after the vehicle is stored;
5. That during the period each day from 10:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M., the tow operator shall tow a stalled vehicle to a safe place in accordance with these regulations. If there is no safe place, the vehicle shall be towed to the nearest licensed storage facility that is lighted and manned on a

- 24-hour basis, provides the vehicle owner with access to a telephone and other facilities, and will not charge any storage-related fees for the first 48 hours after the vehicle is stored;
6. That the tow operator shall provide continuous coverage of its designated freeway segment, respond within six minutes to a call for assistance from a law enforcement officer, and patrol its segment as required by the agreement;
 7. That the tow operator shall cooperate with all law enforcement and other public service employees responding to or present at a law enforcement scene;
 8. That solicitation of business of any kind whatsoever at a law enforcement scene is prohibited;
 9. That the tow operator shall not employ any tow truck operator who does not meet the requirements of this ordinance relating to towing of vehicles;
 10. That, except as otherwise provided in this ordinance, the tow operator shall respond to a law enforcement scene with no more towing capacity than necessary, based on the number of wrecked or stalled vehicles at the scene, to minimize hazards and traffic obstructions within the time designated in the agreement and will expeditiously remove from the freeway any wrecked or stalled vehicle, debris, and other traffic impediment;
 11. That any failure by the tow truck operator to timely respond to a call for assistance shall authorize an incident management supervisor or a law enforcement officer at a law enforcement scene who has determined that public emergency then exists to direct any tow truck operator who carries a valid permit granted in accordance with this ordinance to remove any wrecked or stalled vehicle, debris, or other traffic hazard or impediment;
 12. That emergency road service shall consist of providing towing, gasoline, tire changing, or other services as designated in the agreement;
 13. That the Harris County Sheriff or his or her designee is authorized, upon a determination of a public emergency or when required in the interest of public safety, to direct the tow operator to direct its patrol activities to specific times and / or portions of the tow operator's freeway segment;
 14. That the tow operator shall report any wrecked or stalled vehicle or other hazardous road condition to the Harris County Sheriff's Office and remain at the scene until a law enforcement officer arrives or the operator receives authorization to remove the hazardous condition;
 15. That authorization to remove a wrecked or stalled vehicle shall be provided in the manner and form specified by the agreement; and
 16. That removal of any wrecked or stalled vehicle at the direction of a law enforcement officer shall be documented.