

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 to be an “Ordinance” as that word is used in TEX. TRANS. CODE §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.

B. Jurisdiction

These rules apply to all removals or storage of Motor Vehicles authorized by TEX. TRANS. CODE §545.305 and as hereafter amended, in the unincorporated areas of Harris County.

C. Construction

The Code Construction Act of Texas (TEX. GOV’T CODE CHAP. 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.

1. ACCIDENT – A situation where one or more motor vehicles have collided with any other motor vehicle or object.
2. ADVERSE ACTION – Occurs when an individual or entity’s permit, chip, or ID is collected by or surrendered to a Tow Truck Inspector or Traffic Enforcement Supervisor.
3. 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.
4. APPLICANT – a person who applies for a Harris County ID, Permit, or Chip, or fills out an application for renewal or replacement.
5. APPLICATION – The written application form approved by the HCSO and all required documentation and all applicable fees.
6. ARREST – A situation in which a law enforcement officer takes the vehicle operator into custody.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. CONSENT TOW – Any tow of a motor vehicle in which the tow truck is summoned by the owner or operator of the vehicle or by a person who has possession, custody, or control of the vehicle. The term does not include an incident management tow or a private property tow.
10. 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.

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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 Sections 545.157 and 547.305 of the Texas Transportation Code.
14. 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.”
15. 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.
16. HCSO – The Harris County Sheriff’s Office.
17. HEAVY DUTY TOW TRUCK – A Tow Truck having a chassis rated at 5 tons or greater by the vehicle manufacturer and a winch capable of lifting a minimum of 30,000 pounds as rated by the winch manufacturer. Except where a distinction is made, the term “Tow Truck” includes “Heavy Duty Tow Truck.”
18. HIGH MOUNTED STOP LAMP – A lamp conforming to 49 C.F.R. § 571.108.
19. 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.
20. ID CARD(s) – Identification Card(s) issued to a Tow Truck Operator upon approval by the HCSO. Contains the applicant’s physical description and including, but not limited to the following: picture, height and weight, date of birth, hair and eye color, Texas driver’s license number, current employer, and date the ID card is issued, and date of expiration.
21. LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER – A Harris County Sheriff, the Harris County Fire Marshal, a Harris County Constable or their deputies and other Peace Officers (See TEX. CODE OF CRIM. PROC. Art. 2.12) commissioned by Harris County or Harris County officials.

22. **LAW ENFORCEMENT SCENE** – The scene of a crime, accident, or arrest, or the location of a vehicle which is a traffic hazard, a recovered stolen vehicle, or an abandoned vehicle.
23. **LAW ENFORCEMENT TOW** – Any tow conducted at a Law Enforcement Scene or Evidentiary Crime Scene initiated by a Law Enforcement Officer.
24. **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.
25. **MOTOR VEHICLE** – A vehicle subject to TEX. TRANS. CODE §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.
26. **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.
27. **NONCONSENT 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.
28. **OPERATE** – To drive or otherwise use a Tow Truck.
29. **OPERATOR** – Any person operating a Tow Truck, regardless of whether the person owns the truck.
30. **PERMIT HOLDER** – The person to whom the HCSO issues a permit.
31. **PUBLIC ROAD** – A road, street, or a 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.
32. **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.

33. STALLED VEHICLE – a vehicle that has a flat tire or other mechanical problem, is out of gas or, due to other factors other than physical damage from a collision, may not be operated in a normal manner.
34. STORAGE COMPANY – An individual, 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.
35. TEXAS VEHICLE STORAGE FACILITY ACT – Tex. Occupations Code, Chapter 2303, as amended, and successor statutes thereto.
36. TOW – the removal from public or private property of a vehicle, including a trailer towed by the vehicle, by means of a Tow Truck or Wrecker only.
37. TOWING COMPANY – An individual, 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.
38. TOW TRUCK – A Motor Vehicle adapted or used to tow, carry, push, winch or otherwise move any Motor Vehicle. For purposes of this ordinance, Tow Truck and Wrecker may be used interchangeably.
39. 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.
40. 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.
41. 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.
42. 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.
43. VEHICLE STORAGE FACILITY – An individual, 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.

44. 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.
45. WORKING DAY – Any day that the HCSO conducts normal business, excluding Harris County holidays and weekends.
46. WRECKED VEHICLE – A vehicle that, due to a collision, is incapable of being driven or moved.
47. 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 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 immediately surrender such property. 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 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 be pro-rated. 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 and Chip.
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 and 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 a written Application with the HCSO:

- 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 Operators 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 written application form shall be accompanied by:
- a. Copy of "Tow Truck Cab Card" issued by the Texas Department of License 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. 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 and the certificate holder named as follows:

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF
ATTN: V.C.D./Towing and Storage Unit
1200 Baker Street
Houston, Texas 77002

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. No Application, or supporting documentation, may be submitted by facsimile or electronic mail.

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, it shall issue a Permit and Chip.
2. 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 midnight on January 31, regardless of the issue date. To renew a Permit, the Permit Holder shall file a renewal Application.
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 may be submitted to the HCSO between December 1 and January 31, of each year.
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 1, or he 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 Nontransferable*

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.
2. Proof of insurance shall be carried in the Tow Truck at all times.
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 clarify the type and amount of insurance coverage and provide for thirty (30) days notice to the HCSO of cancellation of, or 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 an individual per occurrence, loss or damage (excluding cargo) per occurrence, or both.
 - b. Each Tow Truck shall have a 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 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 provide 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 or 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 TEX. OCC. CODE § 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 that has been issued a Permit shall maintain a record of Law Enforcement 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 authorized to be towed by any Law Enforcement Agency.

2. 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 shall 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 Operator's ID card(s) are next issued from the office.

B. Application Process

To obtain an ID card(s), the applicant shall submit an application on a form furnished by the HCSO. The application shall provide the following:

1. The name and address of the applicant;
2. The applicant's date of birth;
3. The applicant's height, weight, hair color, eye color, gender, race;
4. The applicant's employer;
5. Whether the applicant was convicted of a felony offense in the past five (5) years preceding the date of the application (including probation and/or deferred adjudication);
6. Whether the applicant was convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude within the last 10 years; and
7. The applicant's signature.

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 one (1) year from the date the ID card was issued.
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 shall deny, refuse to renew, suspend, or revoke an ID card issued under this Ordinance in accordance with Article VII. An application will not be accepted if the Applicant has violated Article VII.

IV. TOW TRUCK OPERATORS 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 lifting capacity of not less than 2,500 pounds;

- 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 be rated at no less than one ton 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 accident 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” 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 Sections 545.157 and 547.305 of the Texas Transportation Code.
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 with a two-way radio or scanner or with any two-way radio that can transmit on any law enforcement frequency or Tow using a Tow Truck equipped with any such devices. Any Operator or Towing Company 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 concealed handgun permit issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety from carrying a firearm while operating or riding in a Tow Truck. LTC (License to carry) information shall be on file with the HCSO. The actual carrying of a weapon by a County licensed wrecker operator on an active Harris County Law Enforcement Scene is strictly prohibited unless otherwise authorized by the investigating deputy.
 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 insure 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 in addition to meeting the safety requirements of this Ordinance.
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, to either an approved Vehicle Storage Facility 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 Vehicle Storage Facility if it is a Vehicle Storage Facility in close proximity to the location of the tow 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. For safety and security reasons, license holders are prohibited from posting complaints on social media. All complaints shall be made in writing and submitted to the Vehicular Crimes Division. Anonymous complaints that do not present sufficient allegations of ordinance violations will not be accepted and will be dismissed without investigation.
15. All operators must exemplify the standards of conduct listed under Sections 86.711 and 86.715 of Title 16 of the Texas Administrative Code. An Operator who is involved in or commits any act of harassment, discrimination, or intimidation of another individual 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. A Tow Operator may only use beacon lights as directed by state law.
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 an accident 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 representative will be allowed to determine who will remove the Motor Vehicle and, if any, the trailer connected to 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.
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 to a length at or no more 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 supervisor with the rank of Sergeant or above, or by HCSO personnel designated as Tow Truck Inspectors.

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 Chip and ID card of any Operator or Tow Truck for violations of this Ordinance at any Law Enforcement Scene.
14. No wrecker driver shall remove any vehicle that is involved in a Law Enforcement scene and requires towing or attach his wrecker 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 wrecker arrives shall not constitute an exception to this section, and 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 investigation.
16. Taking into consideration the location of the vehicle insofar as it may obstruct traffic, traffic conditions, and related factors of traffic management, Law Enforcement Officers shall afford any Vehicle Operator who is present at a Law Enforcement Scene and is able and willing to do so a reasonable time to make arrangements with a wrecker driver of his choice for a consent tow. However, in the event that the Vehicle Operator of a vehicle involved in a Law Enforcement Scene is not present or is incapable of making or unwilling to make his own arrangements with a wrecker driver to remove the vehicle within a reasonable time, the investigating Law Enforcement Officer shall give such orders as may be necessary to remove the vehicle from the street 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 wreckers or as otherwise directed by the law enforcement officer in charge of the police scene or tows on freeways.

18. All wrecker drivers 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 his duty.
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 Tow and Go Motorist Guidelines Handout.

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 its Contract Tow Truck or a Tow Truck selected through a Match 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 a Match. 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 selection of a Permitted Tow Truck at Law Enforcement and Evidentiary Crime Scenes:

1. When the HCSO, Constables, or any other Law Enforcement Agency, investigates an accident in any unincorporated area of Harris County, 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. Additional tow trucks may

be requested by the investigating officer if there are more than three 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 Wreckers, the officer may broadcast "NO MORE WRECKERS". After the broadcast, no additional wreckers 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 may then load the Motor Vehicle upon presentation of a valid ID Card. If a Tow Truck Operator is selected but refuses, or cannot perform the Tow, the Tow Truck Operator shall inform the Officer or the Officer's designee that the Tow Operator is unable or unwilling to perform the Tow and the Officer or the Officer's designee will 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 shall deny, refuse to renew, suspend, or revoke an ID card or Permit for violations under this article in accordance with Article VII.

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. 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 written 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
ATTN: V.C.D/ Towing and Storage Unit
1200 Baker Street
Houston, Texas 77002

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 by the HCSO's Communications Division from a list provided them by 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 the HCSO dispatch another Heavy Duty Tow Truck.
3. The HCSO may only utilize those Heavy Duty Tow Trucks on its official list. Once the approved Heavy Duty Tow Truck has notified the HCSO's Communications Division that it is en route, no other Heavy Duty Tow Trucks will be allowed to load at the Law Enforcement or Evidentiary Crime Scene.
4. Failure to arrive within 45 minutes of notifying the HCSO's Communications Division 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.

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

The HCSO shall 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

A. *Permit Required*

1. Except pursuant to agreement with the vehicle's Operator or when otherwise specifically allowed by this Ordinance and subject to the affirmative defenses under this Ordinance, no person shall store or permit a motor vehicle subject to a Law Enforcement Tow to be stored on his property without a valid Vehicle Storage Facility Permit issued by the HCSO and by the applicable state agency under the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act.
2. A Permit to operate a Vehicle Storage Facility issued by the HCSO is valid only for the physical location indicated on the Permit.
3. A Permit to operate a Vehicle Storage Facility is nontransferable and not assignable.
4. No person shall transport a Motor Vehicle from a Law Enforcement Scene to a Vehicle Storage Facility 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.

B. *Application Process*

1. Each Storage Company shall operate its Vehicle Storage Facility to meet all requirements of the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and be licensed pursuant to that statute 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 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 Vehicle Storage Facility, a person or Storage Company shall file an Application.
3. An Application shall be made under oath and 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 five (5) 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 shall inspect each facility 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 upon a physical inspection does not satisfy the requirements of this section.
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 Vehicle Storage Facility 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 Vehicle Storage Facility Permit issued by the HCSO expires annually on December 1.

2. The owner of a Vehicle Storage Facility may renew its Permit by filing a renewal 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.
4. If the Permit of an individual, partnership, or corporation expires, they 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 Vehicle Storage Facility shall have insurance coverage in one 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 Vehicle Storage Facility'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 Storage Company 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 Storage Facility operator 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 Vehicle Facility Storage 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 tow shall notify the HCSO within two hours of accepting the vehicle. The Tow Truck ticket shall indicate the time of notice and the name of the person at the HCSO that it notified.
3. At a Law Enforcement Officer's request, a Vehicle Storage Facility shall accept any Motor Vehicle 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 storage facility unless it is sold through a public auction. (See TEX. TRANS. 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 Vehicle Storage Facility identified in the Written Directive for the Law Enforcement Tow. If a Vehicle Storage Facility is not identified in the Written Directive, a vehicle shall be towed to a location designated by the vehicle's owner or operator or at an approved Vehicle Storage Facility within the District. However, a vehicle may be towed to a Vehicle Storage Facility if it is a Vehicle Storage Facility in close proximity to the location of the tow and the Vehicle Storage Facility is under the same ownership as the Tow Truck.

6. Each Storage Company shall post at each Vehicle Storage Facility it owns or operates a sign that is plainly visible to the public at all times. The sign shall clearly display the Vehicle Storage Facility Permit number, hours of operation, maximum charges allowed and who to contact about complaints.
7. A Storage Company 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 Storage Company conducts a written inventory of any unsecured personal property contained in the vehicle;
 - b. The Storage Company removes and stores all property for which safekeeping is necessary and specifies such removal and storage on the written inventory;
 - c. The Storage Company 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 Storage Company uses materials such as plastic or canvas tarpaulins to properly protect the vehicle; and
 - e. The Storage Company 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.
8. A Storage Company 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 a 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 provide 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. Vehicle Storage Facility operators shall follow and maintain lots in accordance with Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and regulations issued thereunder.
6. The Storage Company shall keep and maintain records of all Motor Vehicles received by Law Enforcement Tows in a manner and form approved by the HCSO.

I. Allowable Fees

A Vehicle Storage Facility 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.

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

The HCSO, shall 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 violated this Ordinance within the last three (3) years; or
 - e. If the Applicant has a pending case involving moral turpitude classified as Class B Misdemeanor or higher, the HCSO shall 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 Operators 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; or
 - g. Towing a Motor Vehicle that is reported stolen without first contacting a Law Enforcement Agency.
3. If a Company or any of its employees receive more than three violations within a 2 year period, the Company's license shall be revoked.
4. An Operator complaining of another Operator, Permit holder or Law Enforcement Officer may file a written complaint with the HCSO's 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.
5. A Vehicular Crimes Division supervisor with the rank of Sergeant or above or personnel designated as Tow Truck Inspectors 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 Behavior, 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 any Application any ID card or Permit issued under this Ordinance, it shall 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 and through the United States Postal Service.
- 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 V.C.D. 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.

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)(b), (c), or Section VII(A)(2)(c). However, the adverse action may be reviewed by the Vehicular Crimes Division (V.C.D.) Commander by providing written notice with supporting documents to the address for sending notice of appeals herein. Otherwise, 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, by delivering a written notice of appeal within five (5) working days from the 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 Vehicular Crimes Division (V.C.D.) Watch Commander.
5. Upon receipt of a notice of appeal, the V.C.D. Watch Commander shall convene a Disciplinary Hearing Committee, comprised of the following individuals:
 - a. V.C.D. Supervisor or his designee;
 - b. Lieutenant of the district in which the violation occurred; and
 - c. Any other Patrol Supervisor designated by the V.C.D. Watch Commander.
6. The Disciplinary Hearing Committee shall give the person or company making the appeal a written notice stating the date, time and place of the appeal hearing. The person or company that requested the appeal and the Committee is 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 Vehicular Crimes Division (V.C.D.) Commander. The V.C.D. Commander's review shall be final.
7. A person or company forfeits an appeal by failing to file a timely appeal under this article. The HCSO is not required to hold a hearing or render any further decisions.
8. All notices of appeal shall be sent to:

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF
ATTN: V.C.D./Towing and Storage Unit
1200 Baker Street
Houston, Texas 77002

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 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 (1)	
	1. Tow Truck and Heavy Duty Truck	NC
	2. Storage Lot - Per Lot (Includes 1 Inspection)	NC
B	NEW LICENSE FEES (1)	
	ID Card	\$15.00
C	NEW PERMIT FEES (1)	
	Tow Truck	\$ 628.00
	Heavy Duty Tow Truck	\$628.00
	Storage Lot Permit	\$230
	Additional Storage Lot Inspection	\$ 200.00
D	RENEWAL, REPLACEMENT AND REINSTATEMENT FEES (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 1 Inspection)	\$ 230.00
	Reinstatement - Per Lot (Includes 1 Inspection)	\$ 580.00
	5. Chip	
	Initial	NC
	Replacement	\$ 60.00
E	LAW ENFORCEMENT TOW MAXIMUM CHARGES (2)	
	Tow Truck	(3)
	Heavy Duty Truck	
	1. First Two Hours	(3)
	2. Each Additional Hour	(3)
F	VEHICLE STORAGE FACILITY MAXIMUM CHARGES (3)	
	1. Storage Fee	
	a. Vehicle Length no more than 25 feet	(4)
	b. Vehicle Length more than 25 feet	(4)
	2. Impoundment Fee	(4)
	3. Notification Charges (After 24 hours)	(4)

Notes:

- (1) Unless otherwise indicated, all fees are nonrefundable. If any permit is for less than 12 months, the Permit fee must be paid on a pro-rata basis. Any portion of a month shall be deemed an entire month.
- (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 nonconsent tow charges.
- (4) The amounts set by the Texas Vehicle Storage Facility Act and regulations issued thereunder.

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

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 vehicle on the shoulder 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 inventory 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 abandon vehicle will be stored for 48 hours at no cost to the vehicle owner. If the vehicle owner fails to collect their vehicle within the 48hours, the storage fees will start at the time the vehicle arrived at the storage lot and the first 48hours 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 attempt to contact the register 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 wrecker operated by:

- 1. A tow operator holding a contract to conduct freeway towing under Article X of this Ordinance;
- 2. A tow operator called to a police scene on a freeway by a law enforcement officer; or
- 3. A tow 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, including but not limited to a wrecker 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 (B) 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 (B) 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 wrecker driver was acting under the direction of a law enforcement officer, or (ii) the wrecker is a heavy-duty wrecker 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.

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 rate of \$60.00 per tow. 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 a rate of \$145.50.

H. Permitted Riders

With the exception of the driver or passenger(s) of the towed vehicle, only individuals 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 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 nonconsent 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 wrecker driver 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 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 wrecker 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 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 he 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.