

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY

DIVISION OF STATE POLICE

Division of State Police

1301 Nonconsensual Towing

1.0 Authority and Statement of Purpose

- 1.1 The following regulations are promulgated pursuant to 21 **Del.C.** §6901(c) for nonconsensual towing of abandoned or disabled vehicles and vehicles left at the scene of an accident or arrest. These regulations do not prohibit a vehicle owner or driver from using a tow company of their choice provided no public safety concern exists.
- 1.2 The purpose of these regulations is to protect and promote the public safety and to maintain hazard-free streets and highways by, among other things, requiring tow vehicles and equipment to meet minimum specifications; requiring tow truck operators to be licensed and insured; and requiring tow companies to hire only competent and responsible drivers. The regulations also attempt to create an equitable and uniform system of handling towing calls.

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2.0 Definitions

"Approved Tower" means a towing operator that has applied to the Division for certification and been approved by the Division after meeting all criteria for approval, including but not limited to the inspection of the operator's tow vehicles.

"Division" means the Delaware Division of State Police.

"Towing" means the transportation on the streets and highways of the State of Delaware of damaged, disabled, unattended or abandoned vehicles together with personal effects or cargo by tow trucks. Wrecking or wrecker service, tow car service, and garage tow truck service are synonymous with and included within the definition of "towing."

"Tow vehicle" means a motor vehicle altered or designed for, and used in the business of towing vehicles by means of a flat bed or other specially designed truck that is equipped with a tow sling, tow bar, tow plate or wheel lift apparatus, attached to the rear of the truck; or a crane or hoist that is attached to the bed or frame of the tow vehicle. Wrecker, garage tow truck, and slide back or roll back car carriers are synonymous with and included within the definition of "tow vehicle."

"Troop" means 1 or more of the numbered (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9) Division troops located throughout the state.

"Troop Area" means the geographical area or territory of each Troop.

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3.0 Tow Vehicles and Equipment

- 3.1 Tow vehicles shall not exceed the manufacturer's gross vehicle weight or the manufacturer's rated capacity for the towing assembly. All tow vehicle components (winches, booms, wire rope, clamps, thimbles, sheaves, guides, controls, blocks, slings, chains, hooks, and hydraulic components) must be maintained in good condition at all times.
- 3.2 The minimum standards for each class of tow vehicles shall be determined solely by the manufacturer's specifications for the capabilities and capacities of the tow vehicles and towing equipment.
 - 3.2.1 Class "A" Tow Vehicles - Minimum Specifications
 - 3.2.1.1 A gross vehicle weight of at least 10,000 pounds. A crane and a winch with a rating of at least 4 tons must be mounted on the chassis. A roll back bed may substitute for the crane.
 - 3.2.1.2 A wire rope attached to each tow vehicle winch at least 100 feet long with a minimum thickness of 3/8 inches.
 - 3.2.1.3 A tow sling or wheel lift manufactured to prevent damage to the vehicle.
 - 3.2.1.4 At least 2 safety chains to be attached between the tow vehicle and the towed vehicle.
 - 3.2.2 Class "B" Tow Vehicles - Minimum Specifications

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- 3.2.2.1 A gross vehicle weight rating of at least 17,500 pounds. A complete crane and winch having a rating of at least 10 tons must be mounted on the chassis. A roll back bed may substitute for the crane.
- 3.2.2.2 A wire rope attached to each winch at least 100 feet long with a minimum thickness of 1/2 inches.
- 3.2.2.3 A tow sling or wheel lift, or underreach manufactured to prevent damage to the vehicle.
- 3.2.2.4 A minimum of 2 safety chains to be attached between the tow vehicle and the towed vehicle.
- 3.2.2.5 At least 2 portable tail, stop and signal lamps with mounting brackets or mounting clips. The lens shall be red in color, and the lens' diameter shall be at least 3 inches.
- 3.2.3 Class "C" Tow Vehicles - Minimum Specifications
 - 3.2.3.1 A gross vehicle rating of at least 30,000 pounds. A complete crane and winch having a rating of at least 25 tons must be mounted on the chassis.
 - 3.2.3.2 A wire rope attached to each winch at least 150 feet long with a minimum thickness of 5/8 inches.
 - 3.2.3.3 Brakes constructed to comply with federal motor carrier safety regulations and the Delaware motor vehicle code where applicable.
 - 3.2.3.4 A tow sling or wheel lift, or underreach manufactured to prevent damage to the vehicle.
 - 3.2.3.5 At least 2 safety chains to be attached between the tow vehicle and the towed vehicles, or combination of vehicles.
 - 3.2.3.6 At least 2 portable tail, stop and signal lamps with mounting brackets or mounting clips. The lens shall be red in color, and the lens' diameter shall be at least 3 inches.
- 3.2.4 Accessories
 - 3.2.4.1 Each tow vehicle shall be commercially lettered with the operator's business name, city, state, and telephone number visible from both sides of the vehicle, in permanent letters at least 2 ½ inches high.
 - 3.2.4.2 Each tow vehicle shall be equipped at all times as required by the Delaware motor vehicle code and with the following accessories:
 - 3.2.4.2.1 An amber rotor beam or strobe light mounted on the top so as to be seen when in use from front, rear, and both sides. Such beam or light is to be used only when there is a hazardous condition.
 - 3.2.4.2.2 Minimum of 2 work lights on the rear.
 - 3.2.4.2.3 One snatch block for each winch with matching manufacturer's rating.
 - 3.2.4.2.4 A set of scotch blocks for wheels, metal type with tail gate chains, or hydraulic rear extendable scotch blocks (Class B and C vehicles only).
 - 3.2.4.2.5 External air hookup and hoses (Class C vehicles only).
 - 3.2.4.2.6 A set of nylon recovery straps or chains rated at 25,000 pounds (Class B and C vehicles only).
 - 3.2.4.2.7 At least 1 broom, shovel, axe, crowbar or pry bar, set of jumper cables, flashlight, and fire extinguisher.
 - 3.2.4.2.8 Box or container to carry debris.
 - 3.2.4.2.9 Sand or commercial oil and grease absorber for a reasonably small cleanup that does not require the intervention of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

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4.0 Approved Towers

- 4.1 Applications for status as an Approved Tower shall be made in writing and under oath to the Division on forms provided by the Division. The application shall contain all information required therein and shall be directed to the Division's Traffic Section.
- 4.2 The Traffic Control Section shall review each application for form and completeness. The applicant must attach to the application:
 - 4.2.1 Business license;
 - 4.2.2 Proof of insurance for all towing vehicles;
 - 4.2.3 The driving record for each driver;

4.2.4 A criminal background record for each driver, and authorization for the Division to conduct future criminal background checks; and

4.2.5 Schedule of towing and storage rates.

4.3 An application shall be approved if it includes all of the information and documents required by these regulations and otherwise demonstrates compliance with these regulations and applicable law. The Traffic Section will notify the applicant in writing that it has been conferred Approved Tower status, and send a copy of the application and approval to the Troop.

4.4 No tower will be considered for approved status unless it has continuously been in the towing business for at least 12 months prior to the date the application is received. No tower will be considered for approved status unless it has at least 2 vehicles meeting all of the specifications in these regulations.

4.5 No later than January 31 of each year (but not earlier than January 2), each Approved Tower shall complete and return to the Traffic Section a renewal form to be provided by the Division. The renewal form shall attest, under oath, that all of the information in the original application remains correct and complete or notify the Division of any changes in the information in the original application or last renewal form. The renewal form shall include a copy of the Approved Tower's business license, proof of insurance for each towing vehicle, driving record for each driver, and schedule of rates for towing and storage services. The renewal form shall also include criminal background records for any employee hired since the date of the original application or last renewal form. The Division may also conduct its own criminal background checks on any new or existing employee of Approved Towers.

4.6 An Approved Tower must notify the Traffic Section in writing within 10 days of the date of any change in the information supplied on the original application. For example, if the Approved Tower hires a new driver or buys a new towing vehicle, then that information must be provided to the Troop in writing.

4.6.1 Vehicles and Equipment

4.6.1.1 Upon submission of an application, the Traffic Control Section will inspect the applicant's tow vehicles and equipment to determine if they are fit for operation and otherwise in compliance with these regulations and the motor vehicle and traffic laws and federal motor carrier safety regulations, including but not limited to U.S. Department of Transportation rules or regulations. The Troop in whose Troop Area the Approved Tower is assigned may conduct periodic or random inspections to determine if tow vehicles continue to meet all federal, state, and local standards. If, at any time, the Troop finds that a tow vehicle does not meet the minimum specifications for its class, or is not in compliance with any federal, state, or local standards, the Troop shall immediately stop using the services of that Approved Tower until such repairs are made and the tow vehicle is re-inspected by the Troop.

4.6.2. Drivers

4.6.2.1 All tow vehicle drivers must be at least 18 years of age and have the appropriate driver's license for the Approved Tower's tow vehicle.

4.6.2.2 Every driver shall be competent by reason of experience or training to safely operate the type of tow vehicles certified.

4.6.2.3 No driver shall have had within the last 10 years from the date the application is submitted to the Division: more than 1 conviction for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs; any criminal conviction involving theft, dishonesty, or fraud; any felony conviction involving or related to the operation of a tow vehicle; or any judgment (civil or criminal) of having operated a tow vehicle in a grossly negligent manner or in a manner showing a reckless disregard for life or property.

4.6.2.4 The Division may disqualify particular drivers based upon a determination that they pose an unreasonable risk to public safety, notwithstanding the absence of the disqualifiers set forth in subsection 4.6.2.3 and may deny an application where the applicant does not confirm to the Division's satisfaction that it will not use or employ such drivers.

4.6.3 Towing Service

4.6.3.1 All vehicles and equipment owned and operated by the Approved Tower must meet the minimum specifications set forth in these regulations.

4.6.3.2 All vehicles and equipment owned and operated by the Approved Tower must provide proof of insurance for each tow vehicle to the Division at the time of its application for certification, and each year that the Approved Tower renews its certification, or upon demand by the Division.

4.6.3.2.1 The following minimum coverage is required:

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Comprehensive Vehicle Liability Insurance	Limits of Liability
Combined Single Limit	\$1,000,000
Additional Umbrella	\$1,000,000
Garage Liability Insurance	Limits of Liability
Combined Single Limit	\$1,000,000
Additional Umbrella	\$1,000,000
Garage Keeper's Liability	Limits of Liability
Combined Single Limit	\$1,000,000
Additional Umbrella	\$1,000,000
Workers' Compensation	As required by statute
Employer's Liability	As required by statute

4.6.3.2.2 All insurance policies required shall be issued only by companies authorized to do business in Delaware. Coverage must provide for loss from any vehicle or contents such as radios and computers while being handled, towed or stored by the approved tower. Approved Towers must notify the Division of any modification, amendment, cancellation or substitution of any insurance policy required by these regulations within 10 days the Approved Tower learns of the change in circumstances.

- 4.7 Approved Towers must have a principal place of business under their exclusive control and located in their assigned areas. Each Approved Tower must maintain a telephone number to answer calls from the Troop duty officer 24 hours a day, and must maintain at least 1 tow vehicle and 1 qualified driver for that place of business. Towers are not required to be open during holidays and weekends, but must be available upon request to release vehicles during holidays and weekends at no additional charge.
- 4.8 The Approved Tower's storage facility must be located on the same premises or adjacent to its principal place of business. The Approved Tower shall maintain a secure outside storage facility for the control and safekeeping of motor vehicles, enclosed by a fence at least 6 feet high to deter trespass, vandalism, and tampering. With the approval of the Troop Commander, an Approved Tower may use a satellite storage facility on a seasonal basis that is not located on or next to its principal place of business if the satellite facility will be more convenient for the public. The Approved Tower will operate that satellite facility in accordance with the conditions and provisions of this regulation.
- 4.9 The Approved Tower must be able to provide emergency service, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year within its assigned area.

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5.0 Denial of Approved Tower Status

- 5.1 Applications for Approved Tower status may be denied for the following:
- 5.1.1 Failure to provide complete, true, timely, and accurate information on the application, inspection, or renewal forms, or for omitting any material fact on the application, inspection, or renewal forms;
 - 5.1.2 Failure to satisfy or meet any of the requirements of these regulations;
 - 5.1.3 Failure to submit to a tow vehicle inspection;
 - 5.1.4 Failure to obtain or maintain any federal, state, or local license required for the operation of a towing service or tow vehicle or for its drivers; or
 - 5.1.5 Any of the reasons set forth below for revocation of approved status.

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6.0 Towing Service Allocation System

- 6.1 Troop Commanders may designate 1 Approved Tower to be the exclusive tower for the Troop Area or may designate multiple Approved Towers for the Troop Area. In making this decision, factors to consider may include:
 - 6.1.1 Needs of public safety and efficiency of service;
 - 6.1.2 Traffic patterns and accident statistics;
 - 6.1.3 The density of approved towing companies;
 - 6.1.4 Prior history, if any, of response times and reliable and expeditions towing services; and
 - 6.1.5 Any other factor the Troop Commander, in their sole discretion, may deem relevant.
- 6.2 If multiple Approved Towers are to serve a Troop Area, they may be assigned specific geographical areas, within the Troop Area, in which each shall be the exclusive tower. Alternatively, towers may be placed on a rotating list for the entire Troop Area. Troop Commanders shall establish the number of Approved Towers based on the factors in subsection 6.1 and to minimize the management of a rotating system. The Troop Commander may revise the number of Approved Towers if there is a determination that the public is not being appropriately served by the existing number of towers.
- 6.3 Rotating System
 - 6.3.1 Approved Towers shall be called by the Troop to remove vehicles according to the towers' placement on the rotating list, taking into account the tow vehicle classification for the size of the vehicle to be towed. Approved Towers will be called in succession from the top of the list.
 - 6.3.2 The Approved Tower must acknowledge the rotation call by contacting the duty officer at the Troop within five minutes after the rotation call. If the Approved Tower fails to answer or timely return the call, or responds but does not provide adequate assurance of a prompt and reasonable response, the Troop may rotate the Approved Tower to the bottom of the list and call the next Approved Tower.
 - 6.3.3 An Approved Tower shall promptly respond to a call with a tow vehicle classified to meet or exceed the size of the vehicle to be towed. If an Approved Tower truck does not respond to a request for service, or does not maintain a vehicle with the needed classification, that tower shall be rotated to the bottom of the list.
 - 6.3.4 Absent exigent circumstances, when an Approved Tower responds to a call to remove an abandoned vehicle, the Approved Tower shall not be rotated to the bottom of the rotation list but shall remain at the top of the list for the next available call.
 - 6.3.5 Approved Towers will be listed only once on each list and only in the name under which they are certified under these regulations. Approved Tower shall not receive multiple listings or classifications through the use of different or fictitious names.
- 6.4 Troop Commanders have the discretion to request the assistance of Approved Towers from other approved areas or who are not the next tower on a rotating list where, in their discretion, doing so is needed to address an emergency or other public safety concern. In the event of specialized recovery requirements not otherwise met by Approved Towers, the Troop may call specialized recovery equipment on a nearest available basis.
- 6.5 In the event an Approved Tower loses approved status, Troop Commanders shall have the sole discretion to redistribute the tower's territory to other Approved Towers.

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7.0 Recovery Procedures at Scene of Accident

- 7.1 Approved Towers shall not use sirens, mechanical or electronic, but shall use rotating beacons or strobes when in the actual process of recovering a vehicle from the scene of an accident, or while towing that vehicle under conditions that present a potential hazard to the public.
- 7.2 Approved Towers shall sweep all glass and remove all debris from the highway and the right-of-way promptly and prior to leaving the incident or collision scene. Approved Towers shall also spread sand or a commercial oil and grease absorber over small spills of oil, anti-freeze, or other fluids.
- 7.3 Approved Towers shall follow instructions issued by any on-the-scene Trooper with respect to the preservation of physical evidence that may be lost or contaminated where towing, removing or storage of any wrecked, disabled, or abandoned vehicle is involved.
- 7.4 When the owner or operator of a vehicle surrenders physical custody of a vehicle, the Trooper shall prepare a vehicle storage form with an inventory of its contents and a description of any damage to the vehicle or its

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contents. The inventory shall indicate whether the Trooper has instructed that the tower should withhold repossession or delivery of the vehicle to the rightful owner or the owner's agent.

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8.0 Prohibited Acts

- 8.1 No Approved Tower shall stop at the scene of an accident or at or near a disabled vehicle for the purpose of soliciting an engagement for towing service, unless directed to do so by a Trooper.
- 8.2 No Approved Tower shall, without authorization from the Troop, move any vehicle from any public highway, street, or other public area when such vehicle has been abandoned, stolen or damaged as the result of an accident, or following an arrest. Approved Towers may move a vehicle damaged as the result of an accident if the removal is for the purpose of extracting a person from the wreckage or to remove an immediate hazard to life, person, or property. In no event shall any such movement be more than is reasonable or necessary under the circumstances then existing. When movement is necessary, the Approved Tower shall be able to identify the original resting place of the vehicle.

9.0 Rates

- 9.1 Approved Towers shall charge reasonable fees for towing and storage comparable to other towers providing similar services in the Troop Area. Approved Towers shall negotiate in good faith any concerns the Division may have regarding any rates it determines are unreasonable and not commensurate with rates typically charged in similar areas or communities.
- 9.2 The Approved Tower's basic towing or service fees shall be furnished with the certification application and the annual renewal form. These fees should include:
 - 9.2.1 The base tow charges for day and night; storage charges per day;
 - 9.2.2 The base charge for use of winch and dollies; and
 - 9.2.3 The base charge for road service for vehicles requiring fuel, battery jumps, belts, etc.
- 9.3 If there is an interim change in any rate charged by the Approved Tower, it must be reported to the Traffic Control Section within ten days.
- 9.4 For vehicles that are required to be stored as evidence, Approved Towers shall negotiate in good faith caps on total storage costs.

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10.0 Delegating, Subcontracting, and Assignment

- 10.1 No Approved Tower shall delegate or subcontract, on a formal or informal basis, any request for nonconsensual towing service from the Division, or delegate or request assistance from another tower to respond to such a call, or refer a call to another tower or substitute for each other, unless approved in advance by the Troop for good cause.
- 10.2 These regulations are not intended to create a binding contract between the Division and Approved Towers. Accordingly, an Approved Tower's certification, place on the towing rotation system, or assigned area, cannot be sold, leased, assigned, transferred, pledged, surrendered or otherwise encumbered or disposed of to another towing operator, person, or entity. A successor towing service must make a new application for certification to the Division under these regulations. Upon the sale, lease, assignment, transfer, pledge, surrender, or other encumbrance or disposition of the Approved Tower, its business, name, or all or substantially all of its assets, the certification approval terminates immediately by operation of law and that Approved Tower will be dropped from the approved towing list.
- 10.3 These regulations supersede all prior regulations, contracts, agreements, arrangements, or understandings, formal or informal, regarding nonconsensual towing at the request of the Division.

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11.0 Loss of Approved Status

- 11.1 The Division may revoke the approved status of any Approved Tower if the Approved Tower or, where applicable, 1 of its officers, principals, directors, employees, or stockholders owning more than 10 percent of the outstanding stock of the corporation has:
 - 11.1.1 Violated any of these regulations;

- 11.1.2 Made a false or misleading statement of fact or omission of a material fact to the Division in connection with the application, inspection, or renewal;
- 11.1.3 Subcontracted any towing work;
- 11.1.4 Been found bankrupt, insolvent, or in receivership;
- 11.1.5 Been the subject of 2 or more substantiated complaints within any 12-month period from citizens about the Approved Tower's nonconsensual towing services, including but not limited to complaints about charging unreasonable rates for towing or storage, or the refusal to release a vehicle after presentation of sufficient proof of ownership and payment of authorized charges;
- 11.1.6 Failed to carry the required insurance on any of the Approved Tower's tow trucks or for the operation of the tower's business, or the loss of any required federal, state or local license required for the operation and driving of a tow vehicle; or
- 11.1.7 Been unavailable to respond to a Division dispatch or failed to respond to a Division dispatch on at least 3 occasions within any 6-month period, or did not have at least a 75 percent response rate for calls within any 12-month period.
- 11.2 The Division may also revoke the approved status of any Approved Tower that continues to employ someone (despite a Division request for them not to employ) who has:
 - 11.2.1 Been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol, narcotics, or dangerous drugs during the period of certification;
 - 11.2.2 Had their driver's license suspended or revoked;
 - 11.2.3 Been convicted of any crime involving theft, fraud or dishonesty, or any felony involving the operation of a tow vehicle, or been adjudged (civilly or criminally) to have operated a tow vehicle in a grossly negligent manner or in a manner showing a reckless disregard for life or property; or
 - 11.2.4 Imperiled the safety of the public.
- 11.3 If there is an imminent threat to public safety, the Superintendent or his designee may summarily suspend Approved Tower status in writing with a written statement of reasons. If there is no imminent threat to public safety, the Division shall give notice to the Approved Tower in writing of its intent to revoke its approved status and the reasons therefor. If, within 30 days from the date of the receipt of such notice to suspend or revoke, the tower requests a hearing in writing, then the Division will schedule a hearing within 60 days of the tower's request before the Superintendent or his designee. The decision of the Superintendent or his designee shall be in writing and shall be final.

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