



Cambridge Police Department

Effective Date: July 15, 2001

New Policy # 640
Policy and Procedures
2001-4

VEHICLE INVENTORY POLICY

I. Purpose

The purpose of the Cambridge Police Department Motor Vehicle Inventory Search Policy is:

- A. To establish guidelines for inventory searches of motor vehicles brought into the custody of the Cambridge Police Department.
- B. To protect this department and its officers against false claims of damage, loss or theft of an impounded vehicle.
- C. To protect the public and police officers from dangerous substances within an impounded vehicle.

II. Definitions

- A. An “inventory search” is defined as a non-investigatory procedure during which the contents of a motor vehicle are itemized, documented and stored in a secure location, and the condition of the vehicle is noted.
- B. A “locked container” is defined as a container which has a lock on it which is locked and for which the officer has no access to a key or combination.
- C. A “closed container” is defined as a container which has no lock on it or which has a lock, which is unlocked.

III. Procedure

- A. An inventory search of a vehicle will be conducted on any vehicle ordered towed or taken into the custody of this department **except for declared snow emergencies and seasonal street cleaning**. Vehicles towed for street cleaning and snow emergencies will have passenger compartments visually inventoried for items of value in plain view. Due to the time constraints associated with these tows, items of value will not be seized. An inventory list of valuable items will be noted in writing on the claim check.
- B. If feasible, prior to impounding a vehicle, the officer will advise the owner/operator that the vehicle is being taken into police custody for safekeeping and its contents will be inventoried. If the owner/operator cannot establish lawful possession of the vehicle, or is incapacitated, or in exigent circumstances, the officer need not provide this notice.

1. If the owner/operator requests that the officer dispose of the vehicle in a reasonable and lawful manner, as an alternative to impoundment, the officer will comply with that request, provided the vehicle is not evidence.
 - a. Factors that affect reasonableness in the decision to consider alternatives to impoundment include the following:
 1. vehicle is or will be parked illegally;
 2. operator does not have a valid driver's license;
 3. passenger(s) lack a valid driver's license;
 4. high risk of vandalism or theft;
 5. improper insurance;
 6. public safety concerns, including the condition of the vehicle;
 7. operator is or is suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol; and/or
 8. the alternative suggested by owner is unduly burdensome or cannot be accomplished within a short period of time.
 2. If the owner/operator requests to remove or entrust his/her possessions to a third party and doing so would not impede the towing or impoundment process, such request may be granted and the owner/operator may be permitted to enter the vehicle for that purpose.
- C.** The inventory search will be conducted at the scene of the tow, at the tow yard, or at the police station within a reasonably prompt period of time by any officer, including the arresting officer.
- D.** The officer will begin by thoroughly examining the vehicle's exterior for damage and/or missing parts. The officer will then examine the interior of the vehicle for damage, missing parts and personal property.
1. If the vehicle is locked, and it is not necessary to open the vehicle in order to tow it, and there is nothing of significant value visible, the officer will note the exterior damage and items visible within the interior.
 2. Any closed container in the vehicle, including the glove compartment, console, trunk, wallets, pocketbooks, purses, or bags which can be opened without causing damage to the container will be opened and inventoried.
 3. If a closed container cannot be opened without causing damage to it, the container will be inventoried as a single unit unless the searching officer has reasonable suspicion to believe that the container's contents pose a safety or security threat to the officer or others.
 4. If a container is a locked container for which a key is found, the searching officer will unlock the container and inventory its contents. If there is no key available, the searching officer will not open the locked container unless he or she has reasonable suspicion to believe that the container's contents pose a safety or security threat.
- F.** Papers or documents found in the vehicle or within any container searched may be examined only to extent necessary to identify the vehicle's owner,

remove dangerous items, or to determine the value of items found in the vehicle.

- G.** When the officer is satisfied that all personal property in the vehicle has been inventoried, each item of significant value, will be tagged or otherwise marked for proper identification and stored in the first floor vault or property room.
- H.** If the vehicle and its contents may be stored in a secure location, the inventoried items may be secured in the vehicle itself.
- I.** Each time an inventory search of a vehicle is completed, the searching officer will complete a written inventory report. The report will include at least the following information:
 - a. The vehicle's make, model, color and registration or VIN
 - b. The circumstances in which the vehicle was impounded/towed
 - c. The name of the towing company that towed the car
 - d. The date, time and location of the search
 - e. The name and badge number of the officer who conducted the search and inventory.
 - f. The identity, if known, of the owner and operator (if different).

IV. Release of Property

- A.** When the vehicle is released from impoundment, all property except any seized property, e.g. contraband, unlawfully possessed weapons, or dangerous instrumentalities, will be returned to the owner/operator. All such property seized will be indicated on the inventory report form.
- B.** The owner/operator and officer or property clerk will sign the inventory form acknowledging return of all property inventoried during the inventory search and retention of seized property. If the owner/operator refuses to sign the form acknowledging the return of inventoried property and retention of seized property, the officer will note the refusal and the reason, if any, on the form.
- C.** If the owner/operator is not able to retrieve his/her own property, a letter signed by the owner authorizing its release will be required. Positive identification of the person retrieving the property is necessary.

POLICE COMMISSIONER