



# El Segundo Police Department

## Training Section

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## TRAINING BULLETIN

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### Bandit Tow Trucks

**PURPOSE** - This notice is to advise all personnel of the significant increase in **Bandit Tow Truck** activity throughout Southern California and to provide guidance on identification, enforcement, and proper handling of these incidents at collision and incident scenes.

**BACKGROUND** - Bandit tow trucks, also known as chaser tow trucks, are unauthorized towing operators who illegally monitor police and fire radio traffic or actively patrol areas in search of traffic collisions. These operators arrive **uninvited and unsolicited**, often before an authorized tow has been requested or dispatched.

Bandit tow operators may exploit collision victims by:

- Charging **excessive and unlawful towing and storage fees**
- Improperly handling vehicles
- Delaying collision investigations and scene clearance
- Creating additional **public safety hazards**

Members of the National Insurance Crime Bureau have reported that due to limited enforcement statewide and insurance companies continuing to pay inflated towing and storage bills, this issue is **worsening**.

### LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The following statutes provide authority and guidance for enforcement:

- **CVC § 22651**  
Authorizes law enforcement to impound vehicles.
- **CVC § 22513**  
Prohibits tow operators from stopping at or near an accident scene unless dispatched by law enforcement or explicitly requested by the vehicle owner. A violation of Vehicle Code § 22513 is a misdemeanor.

- **Penal Code § 636.5**  
Prohibits individuals from monitoring official police or fire radio traffic for the purpose of using the communication to assist in the commission of a criminal offense, such as Vehicle Code §22513. A violation of Penal Code § 636.5 is a misdemeanor.
- **CVC § 34620**  
Prohibits operating a tow truck without a valid **Motor Carrier Permit (MCP)**.
- **CVC §§ 34507.5, 27900, and 27901**  
Tow trucks with a valid MCP must display, at a minimum, in letters in sharp contrast to the background and shall be of such a size, shape, and color as to be readily legible during daylight hours from a distance of 50 feet:
  - Carrier Identification Number
  - Business Name or Trademark
- **CVC § 22524.5(c)(2)(A)**  
Provides that a towing and storage charge shall be deemed reasonable if it does not exceed the fees and rates charged for similar services provided in response to requests initiated by a public agency, including the California Highway Patrol or a local police department.
- **CVC § 10652.5**  
Defines specific “unreasonable” charges that may not be billed.  
NOTE: Tow industry professionals report that bandit tow operators frequently charge presumptively unreasonable rates and fees as defined by this section.
- **CVC § 22651.07**  
Establishes mandatory invoice requirements for towing services. A violation of § 22651.07 is enforced through civil enforcement mechanisms.

## **HANDLING UNAUTHORIZED TOWING ATTEMPTS**

If an unauthorized tow truck arrives at a collision or incident scene, the following steps should be taken:

### **1. Immediate Action**

- Instruct the tow truck operator to leave the area immediately if they were not requested by the vehicle owner or dispatched by law enforcement.

### **2. Verification of Proper Summons**

- A legitimately summoned tow truck operator must provide verification of being summoned. The documentation a tow truck operator is required to provide varies depending on whether the tow was initiated by law enforcement, requested by the vehicle owner or operator (including flag-downs), or conducted without prior request. See CVC § 22513 for the specific information and authorization requirements applicable to each scenario.
- Tow operators who are unlicensed or unauthorized may be cited and/or have the tow truck impounded pursuant to applicable law.

### **3. Reporting**

- Thoroughly document the incident, including:
  - Tow company name
  - Tow truck license plate number
  - CA number (if displayed)
  - Observed violations
  - Statements made by the operator

### **CONCLUSION**

Bandit tow trucks present a significant public safety issue and victimize members of our community during stressful and vulnerable moments. All personnel are expected to remain vigilant, enforce applicable laws, and take appropriate action to prevent unauthorized towing activity.