Chapter 46.55 RCW
TOWING AND IMPOUNDMENT

Sections

46.55.010 Definitions.

TOW TRUCK OPERATORS—REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

46.55.020 Registration required—Penalty.
46.55.025 Registration or insurance required—Penalty.
46.55.030 Application—Contents, bond, insurance, fee, certificate.
46.55.035 Prohibited acts—Penalty.
46.55.037 Compensation for private impounds.
46.55.040 Permit required—Inspections of equipment and facilities.
46.55.050 Classification of trucks—Marking requirements—Time and place of inspection—Penalty.
46.55.060 Business location—Requirements.
46.55.063 Fees, schedules, contracts, invoices.
46.55.065 License plate indicator tabs—Transporter business—Hulk hauler, scrap processor business—Wrecker business—Fees—Tab requirements.

IMPOUNDING UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES

46.55.070 Posting requirements—Exception.
46.55.075 Law enforcement impound—Required form, procedures.
46.55.080 Law enforcement, authorized regional transit authority representative, other public official impound, private impound—Master log—Certain associations restricted.
46.55.085 Law enforcement impound—Unauthorized vehicle in right-of-way.
46.55.090 Storage, return requirements—Vehicles, personal belongings—Combination endorsement for tow truck drivers—Viewing impounded vehicle.
46.55.100 Impound notice—Abandoned vehicle report—Owner information, liability—Disposition report.
46.55.105 Responsibility of registered owner—Buyer and seller remedies.
46.55.110 Notice to legal and registered owners.
46.55.113 Removal by police officer—Definition.
46.55.115 State patrol—Appointment of towing operators—Lien for costs—Appeal.
46.55.117 Impounds under RCW 64.44.050.
46.55.118 Rate, fee limitations for certain private impounds.

REDEMPTION RIGHTS AND HEARING PROCEDURES

46.55.120 Redemption of vehicles—Sale of unredeemed property—Improper impoundment.
46.55.125 Redemption of motorcycle or moped as bailment while owner hospitalized due to accident—Requirements—Declaration form.
46.55.130 Notice requirements—Public auction—Accumulation of storage charges.
46.55.140 Operator's lien, deficiency claim, liability.

RECORDS, INSPECTIONS, AND ENFORCEMENT

46.55.150 Vehicle transaction file.

46.55.160 Availability of records, equipment, and facilities for audit and inspection.
46.55.170 Complaints, where forwarded.
46.55.180 Presiding officer at licensing hearing.
46.55.190 Rules.
46.55.200 Penalties for certain acts or omissions.
46.55.210 Cease and desist order.
46.55.220 Refusal to issue license, grounds for.

JUNK VEHICLE DISPOSITION

46.55.230 Junk vehicles—Removal, disposal, sale—Penalties—Cleanup restitution payment.

LOCAL REGULATION

46.55.240 Local ordinances—Requirements.

VEHICLE IMMOBILIZATION

46.55.300 Vehicle immobilization.

IMPOUNDMENT AFTER ARREST FOR DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

46.55.360 Impoundment, when required—Law enforcement powers, duties, and liability immunity—Redemption, when, by whom—Operator liability immunity—Definition.
46.55.370 Law enforcement liability immunity—Reasonable suspicion.

ABANDONED RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

46.55.400 Transporting abandoned recreational vehicles—Record of delivery—Report—Liability.

MISCELLANEOUS

46.55.700 Program to compensate registered tow truck operators—Private property impounds, impounds performed under law enforcement direction—Form—Disbursement of excess funds—Annual report—Lien, deficiency claim—Notice.
46.55.901 Headings not part of law—1985 c 377.
46.55.902 Effective date—1985 c 377.
46.55.910 Chapter not applicable to certain activities of department of transportation.

Removal of unattended vehicle from highway: RCW 46.61.590.

Riding in towed vehicles: RCW 46.61.625.

Safety chains for towing: RCW 46.37.495.

RCW 46.55.010 Definitions. The definitions set forth in this section apply throughout this chapter:

(1) "Abandoned vehicle" means a vehicle that a registered tow truck operator has impounded and held in the operator's possession for 120 consecutive hours.

(2) "Abandoned vehicle report" means the document prescribed by the state that the towing operator forwards to the department after a vehicle has become abandoned.

(3) "Immobilize" means the use of a locking wheel boot that, when attached to the wheel of a vehicle, prevents the vehicle from moving

without damage to the tire to which the locking wheel boot is attached.

(4) "Impound" means to take and hold a vehicle in legal custody. There are two types of impounds—public and private.

(a) "Public impound" means that the vehicle has been impounded at the direction of a law enforcement officer or by a public official having jurisdiction over the public property upon which the vehicle was located.

(b) "Private impound" means that the vehicle has been impounded at the direction of a person having control or possession of the private property upon which the vehicle was located.

(5) "Junk vehicle" means a vehicle certified under RCW 46.55.230 as meeting at least three of the following requirements:

(a) Is three years old or older;

(b) Is extensively damaged, such damage including but not limited to any of the following: A broken window or windshield, or missing wheels, tires, motor, or transmission;

(c) Is apparently inoperable;

(d) Has an approximate fair market value equal only to the approximate value of the scrap in it.

(6) "Master log" means the document or an electronic facsimile prescribed by the department and the Washington state patrol in which an operator records transactions involving impounded vehicles.

(7) "Registered tow truck operator" or "operator" means any person who engages in the impounding, transporting, or storage of unauthorized vehicles or the disposal of abandoned vehicles.

(8) "Residential property" means property that has no more than four living units located on it.

(9) "Suspended license impound" means an impound ordered under RCW 46.55.113 because the operator was arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345.

(10) "Tow truck" means a motor vehicle that is equipped for and used in the business of towing vehicles with equipment as approved by the state patrol.

(11) "Tow truck number" means the number issued by the department to tow trucks used by a registered tow truck operator in the state of Washington.

(12) "Tow truck permit" means the permit issued annually by the department that has the classification of service the tow truck may provide stamped upon it.

(13) "Tow truck service" means the transporting upon the public streets and highways of this state of vehicles, together with personal effects and cargo, by a tow truck of a registered operator.

(14) "Unauthorized vehicle" means a vehicle that is subject to impoundment after being left unattended in one of the following public or private locations for the indicated period of time:

		Subject to removal after:
(a)	Public locations:	
(i)	Constituting an accident or a traffic hazard as defined in RCW 46.55.113	Immediately
(ii)	On a highway and tagged as described in RCW 46.55.085	24 hours
(iii)	In a publicly owned or controlled parking facility, properly posted under RCW 46.55.070	Immediately

(iv)	Within the right-of-way used by a regional transit authority for high capacity transportation where the vehicle constitutes an obstruction to the operation of high capacity transportation vehicles or jeopardizes public safety.	Immediately
(v)	Within the right-of-way used by a city with a population greater than 700,000 for streetcar operations where the vehicle constitutes an obstruction to the operation of streetcar vehicles or jeopardizes public safety	Immediately
(b)	Private locations:	
(i)	On residential property	Immediately
(ii)	On private, nonresidential property, properly posted under RCW 46.55.070	Immediately
(iii)	On private, nonresidential property, not posted	24 hours

[2026 c 99 s 1. Prior: 2023 c 326 s 1; 2022 c 186 s 708; 2005 c 88 s 2; 1999 c 398 s 2; 1998 c 203 s 8; 1994 c 176 s 1; 1991 c 292 s 1; 1989 c 111 s 1; prior: 1987 c 330 s 739; 1987 c 311 s 1; 1985 c 377 s 1.]

Effective date—2026 c 99: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [March 18, 2026]." [2026 c 99 s 3.]

Effective date—2022 c 186: See note following RCW 47.01.071.

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

Construction—Application of rules—Severability—1987 c 330: See notes following RCW 28B.12.050.

TOW TRUCK OPERATORS—REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

RCW 46.55.020 Registration required—Penalty. (1) A person shall not engage in or offer to engage in the activities of a registered tow truck operator without a current registration certificate from the department of licensing authorizing him or her to engage in such activities.

(2) Any person engaging in or offering to engage in the activities of a registered tow truck operator without the registration certificate required by this chapter is guilty of a gross misdemeanor.

(3) A registered operator who engages in a business practice that is prohibited under this chapter may be issued a notice of traffic infraction under chapter 46.63 RCW and is also subject to the civil penalties that may be imposed by the department under this chapter.

(4) A person found to have committed an offense that is a traffic infraction under this chapter is subject to a monetary penalty of at least two hundred fifty dollars.

(5) All traffic infractions issued under this chapter shall be under the jurisdiction of the district court in whose jurisdiction they were issued. [2003 c 53 s 243; 1989 c 111 s 2; 1985 c 377 s 2.]

Intent—Effective date—2003 c 53: See notes following RCW 2.48.180.

RCW 46.55.025 Registration or insurance required—Penalty. A vehicle engaging in the business of recovery of disabled vehicles for monetary compensation, from or on a public road or highway must either be operated by a registered tow truck operator, or someone who at a minimum has insurance in a like manner and amount as prescribed in RCW 46.55.030(3), and have had their tow trucks inspected in a like manner as prescribed by RCW 46.55.040(1). The department shall adopt rules to enforce this section. Failure to comply with this section is a class 1 civil infraction punishable under RCW 7.80.120. [1995 c 360 s 2.]

RCW 46.55.030 Application—Contents, bond, insurance, fee, certificate. (1) Application for licensing as a registered tow truck operator shall be made on forms furnished by the department, shall be accompanied by an inspection certification from the Washington state patrol, shall be signed by the applicant or an agent, and shall include the following information:

(a) The name and address of the person, firm, partnership, association, or corporation under whose name the business is to be conducted;

(b) The names and addresses of all persons having an interest in the business, or if the owner is a corporation, the names and addresses of the officers of the corporation;

(c) The names and addresses of all employees who serve as tow truck drivers;

(d) Proof of minimum insurance required by subsection (3) of this section;

(e) The vehicle license and vehicle identification numbers of all tow trucks of which the applicant is the registered owner;

(f) Any other information the department may require; and

(g) A certificate of approval from the Washington state patrol certifying that:

(i) The applicant has an established place of business and that mail is received at the address shown on the application;

(ii) The address of any storage locations where vehicles may be stored is correctly stated on the application;

(iii) The place of business has an office area that is accessible to the public without entering the storage area; and

(iv) The place of business has adequate and secure storage facilities, as defined in this chapter and the rules of the department, where vehicles and their contents can be properly stored and protected.

(2) Before issuing a registration certificate to an applicant the department shall require the applicant to file with the department a surety bond in the amount of five thousand dollars running to the state and executed by a surety company authorized to do business in this state. The bond shall be approved as to form by the attorney general and conditioned that the operator shall conduct his or her business in conformity with the provisions of this chapter pertaining to abandoned or unauthorized vehicles, and to compensate any person, company, or the state for failure to comply with this chapter or the rules adopted hereunder, or for fraud, negligence, or

misrepresentation in the handling of these vehicles. Any person injured by the tow truck operator's failure to fully perform duties imposed by this chapter and the rules adopted hereunder, or an ordinance or resolution adopted by a city, town, or county is entitled to recover actual damages, including reasonable attorney's fees against the surety and the tow truck operator. Successive recoveries against the bond shall be permitted, but the aggregate liability of the surety to all persons shall not exceed the amount of the bond. As a condition of authority to do business, the operator shall keep the bond in full force and effect. Failure to maintain the penalty value of the bond or cancellation of the bond by the surety automatically cancels the operator's registration.

(3) Before the department may issue a registration certificate to an applicant, the applicant shall provide proof of minimum insurance requirements of:

(a) One hundred thousand dollars for liability for bodily injury or property damage per occurrence; and

(b) Fifty thousand dollars of legal liability per occurrence, to protect against vehicle damage, including but not limited to fire and theft, from the time a vehicle comes into the custody of an operator until it is redeemed or sold.

Cancellation of or failure to maintain the insurance required by (a) and (b) of this subsection automatically cancels the operator's registration.

(4) The fee for each original registration and annual renewal is one hundred dollars per company, plus fifty dollars per truck. The department shall forward the registration fee to the state treasurer for deposit in the motor vehicle fund.

(5) The applicant must submit an inspection certificate from the state patrol before the department may issue or renew an operator's registration certificate or tow truck permits.

(6) Upon approval of the application, the department shall issue a registration certificate to the registered operator to be displayed prominently at the operator's place of business. [2010 c 8 s 9061; 1989 c 111 s 3; 1987 c 311 s 2; 1985 c 377 s 3.]

RCW 46.55.035 Prohibited acts—Penalty. (1) No registered tow truck operator may:

(a) Except as authorized under RCW 46.55.037, ask for or receive any compensation, gratuity, reward, or promise thereof from a person having control or possession of private property or from an agent of the person authorized to sign an impound authorization, for or on account of the impounding of a vehicle;

(b) Be beneficially interested in a contract, agreement, or understanding that may be made by or between a person having control or possession of private property and an agent of the person authorized to sign an impound authorization;

(c) Have a financial, equitable, or ownership interest in a firm, partnership, association, or corporation whose functions include acting as an agent or a representative of a property owner for the purpose of signing impound authorizations;

(d) Enter into any contract or agreement or offer any program that provides an incentive to a person authorized to order a private impound under RCW 46.55.080 that is related to the authorization of an impound or a number of impounds.

(i) The incentives prohibited by this section may be either monetary or nonmonetary things of value, such as gifts or prizes which are contingent on, or as a reward for the authorization of impounds.

(ii) Gifts of de minimis value that are given in the ordinary course of business and are not tied to any specific decision to authorize an impound or impounds are not prohibited. Permitted gifts would include promotional items such as pens, calendars, cups, and other items labeled with the registered tow truck operator's business information, holiday gifts such as cookies or candy, flowers for occasions such as illness or death, or the cost of a single meal for one person when discussing business.

(iii) The provision of the actual physical signs required by this chapter to be posted on private property and the labor and materials for placing them is not a violation of this section.

(2) This section does not prohibit the registered tow truck operator from collecting the costs of towing, storage, tolls or ferry fares paid, or other services rendered during the course of towing, removing, impounding, or storing of an impounded vehicle as provided by RCW 46.55.120.

(3) A violation of this section is a gross misdemeanor. [2012 c 18 s 1; 2010 c 56 s 1; 1992 c 18 s 1; 1989 c 111 s 4.]

Riding in towed vehicles: RCW 46.61.625.

Safety chains for towing: RCW 46.37.495.

RCW 46.55.037 Compensation for private impounds. A registered tow truck operator may receive compensation from a private property owner or agent for a private impound of an unauthorized vehicle that has an approximate fair market value equal only to the approximate value of the scrap in it. The private property owner or an agent must authorize the impound under RCW 46.55.080. The registered tow truck operator shall process the vehicle in accordance with this chapter and shall deduct any compensation received from the private property owner or agent from the amount of the lien on the vehicle in accordance with this chapter. [1992 c 18 s 2.]

RCW 46.55.040 Permit required—Inspections of equipment and facilities. (1) A registered operator shall apply for and keep current a tow truck permit for each tow truck of which the operator is the registered owner. Application for a tow truck permit shall be accompanied by a report from the Washington state patrol covering a physical inspection of each tow truck capable of being used by the applicant.

(2) Upon receipt of the fee provided in RCW 46.55.030(4) and a satisfactory inspection report from the state patrol, the department shall issue each tow truck an annual tow truck permit or decal. The class of the tow truck, determined according to RCW 46.55.050, shall be stamped on the permit or decal. The permit or decal shall be displayed on the passenger side of the truck's front windshield.

(3) A tow truck number from the department shall be affixed in a permanent manner to each tow truck.

(4) The Washington state patrol shall conduct annual inspections of tow truck operators' equipment and facilities during the operators'

normal business hours. Unscheduled inspections may be conducted without notice at the operator's place of business by an inspector to determine the fitness of a tow truck or facilities. At the time of the inspection, the operator shall provide a paper copy of the master log referred to in RCW 46.55.080.

(5) If at the time of the annual or subsequent inspections the equipment does not meet the requirements of this chapter, and the deficiency is a safety related deficiency, or the equipment is necessary to the truck's performance, the inspector shall cause the registered tow truck operator to remove that equipment from service as a tow truck until such time as the equipment has been satisfactorily repaired. A red tag shall be placed on the windshield of a tow truck taken out of service, and the tow truck shall not provide tow truck service until the Washington state patrol recertifies the truck and removes the tag. [1989 c 111 s 5; 1985 c 377 s 4.]

RCW 46.55.050 Classification of trucks—Marking requirements—Time and place of inspection—Penalty. (1) Tow trucks shall be classified by towing capabilities, and shall meet or exceed all equipment standards set by the state patrol for the type of tow trucks to be used by an operator.

(2) All tow trucks shall display the firm's name, city of address, and telephone number. This information shall be painted on or permanently affixed to both sides of the vehicle in accordance with rules adopted by the department.

(3) Before a tow truck is put into tow truck service, or when the reinspection of a tow truck is necessary, the district commander of the state patrol shall designate a location and time for the inspection to be conducted. When practicable, the inspection or reinspection shall be made within three business days following the request by the operator.

(4) Failure to comply with any requirement of this section or rules adopted under it is a traffic infraction. [1987 c 330 s 740; 1985 c 377 s 5.]

Construction—Application of rules—Severability—1987 c 330: See notes following RCW 28B.12.050.

RCW 46.55.060 Business location—Requirements. (1) The address that the tow truck operator lists on his or her application shall be the business location of the firm where its files are kept. Each separate business location requires a separate registration under this chapter. The application shall also list all locations of secure areas for vehicle storage and redemption.

(2) Before an additional lot may be used for vehicle storage, it must be inspected and approved by the state patrol. The lot must also be inspected and approved on an annual basis for continued use.

(3) Each business location must have a sign displaying the firm's name that is readable from the street.

(4) At the business locations listed where vehicles may be redeemed, the registered operator shall post in a conspicuous and accessible location:

(a) All pertinent licenses and permits to operate as a registered tow truck operator;

(b) The current towing and storage charges itemized on a form approved by the department;

(c) The vehicle redemption procedure and rights;

(d) Information supplied by the department as to where complaints regarding either equipment or service are to be directed;

(e) Information concerning the acceptance of commercially reasonable tender as defined in RCW 46.55.120(1)(f).

(5) The department shall adopt rules concerning fencing and security requirements of storage areas, which may provide for modifications or exemptions where needed to achieve compliance with local zoning laws.

(6) On any day when the registered tow truck operator holds the towing services open for business, the business office shall remain open with personnel present who are able to release impounded vehicles in accordance with this chapter and the rules adopted under it. The normal business hours of a towing service shall be from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. The business office may be closed for no more than one hour between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. if a notice is clearly visible at the door with a telephone number at which personnel can be reached to return within no more than one-half of an hour to release an impounded vehicle. If the caller does in fact redeem the vehicle when the personnel returns to release the vehicle, the accrual of charges for storage ceases at the time of the call.

(7) A registered tow truck operator shall maintain personnel who can be contacted twenty-four hours a day to release impounded vehicles within a reasonable time.

(8) A registered operator shall provide access to a telephone for any person redeeming a vehicle, at the time of redemption. [2015 c 227 s 1; 1989 c 111 s 6; 1987 c 311 s 3; 1985 c 377 s 6.]

RCW 46.55.063 Fees, schedules, contracts, invoices. (1) An operator shall file a fee schedule with the department. All filed fees must be adequate to cover the costs of service provided. No fees may exceed those filed with the department. At least ten days before the effective date of any change in an operator's fee schedule, the registered tow truck operator shall file the revised fee schedule with the department.

(2) Towing contracts with private property owners shall be in written form and state the hours of authorization to impound, the persons empowered to authorize the impounds, and the present charge of a private impound for the classes of tow trucks to be used in the impound, and must be retained in the files of the registered tow truck operator for three years.

(3) A fee that is charged for tow truck service must be calculated on an hourly basis, and after the first hour must be charged to the nearest quarter hour.

(4) Fees that are charged for the storage of a vehicle, or for other items of personal property registered or titled with the department, must be calculated on a twenty-four hour basis and must be charged to the nearest half day from the time when the operator has unloaded the vehicle and completed the necessary paperwork at the secure storage area. The total amount of time to unload the towed vehicle, complete required paperwork, and reasonably prepare the tow truck to return to service may be charged as part of the tow truck service in fifteen-minute increments not to exceed a total of sixty

minutes after the return of the tow truck to the secure storage area. If a portion of any fifteen-minute increment exceeds a total of eight minutes, the total minutes must be rounded up to the next highest fifteen-minute period of total time except in the last fifteen minutes of the total sixty minutes. However, items of personal property registered or titled with the department that are wholly contained within an impounded vehicle are not subject to additional storage fees; they are, however, subject to satisfying the underlying lien for towing and storage of the vehicle in which they are contained.

(5) All billing invoices that are provided to the redeemer of the vehicle, or other items of personal property registered or titled with the department, must be itemized so that the individual fees are clearly discernible. [2017 c 94 s 1; 1995 c 360 s 3; 1989 c 111 s 7.]

RCW 46.55.065 License plate indicator tabs—Transporter business—Hulk hauler, scrap processor business—Wrecker business—Fees—Tab requirements. (1) If a tow truck, the registered owner of which is a registered tow truck operator, is to conduct transporter business under chapter 46.76 RCW, the license plate that is required to be displayed under RCW 46.16A.030 must contain an indicator tab that the vehicle is licensed to perform transporter services. The fee for an original transporter's license plate indicator tab for a tow truck, the registered owner of which is a registered tow truck operator, is two dollars. Vehicles that are used to conduct transporter business and are not owned by a registered tow truck operator must follow the requirements of chapter 46.76 RCW.

(2) If a tow truck, the registered owner of which is a registered tow truck operator, is used for a hulk hauler or scrap processor business under chapter 46.79 RCW, the license plate that is required under RCW 46.16A.030 must contain an indicator tab that the vehicle is licensed to perform hulk hauler or scrap processor purposes under the laws of the state of Washington. The fee for a hulk hauler or scrap processor business license plate indicator tab is five dollars for the original tab and two dollars for each additional tab. Vehicles that are used to conduct hulk hauler or scrap processor business and are not owned by a registered tow truck operator must follow the requirements of chapter 46.79 RCW.

(3) If a tow truck, the registered owner of which is a registered tow truck operator, is used for a wrecker business under chapter 46.80 RCW, the license plate displayed that is required under RCW 46.16A.030 must contain an indicator tab that the vehicle is licensed to perform wrecker services. The fee for a wrecker license plate indicator tab is five dollars for the original tab and two dollars for each additional tab. Vehicles that are used to conduct wrecker business and are not owned by a registered tow truck operator must follow the requirements of chapter 46.80 RCW.

(4)(a) The license plate indicator tabs must:

(i) Affix to the license plate required to be displayed under RCW 46.16A.030;

(ii) Clearly identify the business purpose of the licensed vehicle;

(iii) Use some combination of letters and numbers to indicate a vehicle is licensed to conduct transporter business under chapter 46.76 RCW, hulk hauler or scrap processor business under chapter 46.79 RCW, or wrecker business under chapter 46.80 RCW; and

(iv) Be approved by the department.

(b) All other requirements concerning registration and display of plates as required under chapter 46.16A RCW may not conflict with this section.

(5) Chapter 135, Laws of 2018 does not allow for the use of indicator tabs, authorized in this section, on a special or personalized license plate authorized in chapter 46.18 RCW. [2019 c 44 s 6; 2018 c 135 s 2.]

Effective date—2019 c 44 ss 6 and 7: "Sections 6 and 7 of this act are necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and take effect June 1, 2019." [2019 c 44 s 9.]

Findings—2018 c 135: "(1) The legislature finds that efficiency and public safety is served by consolidating the multiple license plates currently required on the vehicles of registered tow truck operators. These registered tow truck operators currently have up to four separate license plates that are required to be displayed on the vehicle at all times. The operators have the highest training and qualifications of any towing operators in Washington state.

(2) The legislature further finds that a single unified license plate with separate endorsement tabs prevents confusion and allows for easy identification and review of tow trucks by law enforcement and the motoring public. The unified license plate also saves resources by reducing the need for license plate production and reduces fraud by limiting access to these commercial license plates.

(3) A unified license plate for registered tow truck operators serves the purposes of Washington residents, the motoring public, and law enforcement, and saves money as well." [2018 c 135 s 1.]

Effective date—2018 c 135: "This act takes effect June 1, 2019." [2018 c 135 s 10.]

IMPOUNDING UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES

RCW 46.55.070 Posting requirements—Exception. (1) No person may impound, tow, or otherwise disturb any unauthorized vehicle standing on nonresidential private property or in a public parking facility for less than twenty-four hours unless a sign is posted near each entrance and on the property in a clearly conspicuous and visible location to all who park on such property that clearly indicates:

(a) The times a vehicle may be impounded as an unauthorized vehicle; and

(b) The name, telephone number, and address of the towing firm where the vehicle may be redeemed.

(2) The requirements of subsection (1) of this section do not apply to residential property. Any person having charge of such property may have an unauthorized vehicle impounded immediately upon giving written authorization.

(3) The department shall adopt rules relating to the size of the sign required by subsection (1) of this section, its lettering, placement, and the number required.

(4) This section applies to all new signs erected after July 1, 1986. All other signs must meet these requirements by July 1, 1989. [1987 c 311 s 4; 1985 c 377 s 7.]

Vehicle immobilization unlawful: RCW 46.55.300.

RCW 46.55.075 Law enforcement impound—Required form, procedures. (1) The Washington state patrol shall provide by rule for a uniform impound authorization and inventory form. All law enforcement agencies must use this form for all vehicle impounds after June 30, 2001.

(2) By January 1, 2003, the Washington state patrol shall develop uniform impound procedures, which must include but are not limited to defining an impound and a visual inspection. Local law enforcement agencies shall adopt the procedures by July 1, 2003. [2002 c 279 s 5; 1999 c 398 s 3.]

RCW 46.55.080 Law enforcement, authorized regional transit authority representative, other public official impound, private impound—Master log—Certain associations restricted. (1) If a vehicle is in violation of the time restrictions of RCW 46.55.010(14), it may be impounded by a registered tow truck operator at the direction of a law enforcement officer, authorized regional transit authority representative under the conditions described in RCW 46.55.010(14)(a)(iv), authorized city representative under the conditions described in RCW 46.55.010(14)(a)(v), or other public official with jurisdiction if the vehicle is on public property, or at the direction of the property owner or an agent if it is on private property. A law enforcement officer may also direct the impoundment of a vehicle pursuant to a writ or court order.

(2) The person requesting a private impound or a law enforcement officer, authorized regional transit authority representative, authorized city representative, or public official requesting a public impound shall provide a signed authorization for the impound at the time and place of the impound to the registered tow truck operator before the operator may proceed with the impound. A registered tow truck operator, employee, or his or her agent may not serve as an agent of a property owner for the purposes of signing an impound authorization or, independent of the property owner, identify a vehicle for impound.

(3) In the case of a private impound, the impound authorization shall include the following statement: "A person authorizing this impound, if the impound is found in violation of chapter 46.55 RCW, may be held liable for the costs incurred by the vehicle owner."

(4) A registered tow truck operator shall record and keep in the operator's files the date and time that a vehicle is put in the operator's custody and released. The operator shall make an entry into a master log regarding transactions relating to impounded vehicles. The operator shall make this master log available, upon request, to representatives of the department or the state patrol.

(5) A person who engages in or offers to engage in the activities of a registered tow truck operator may not be associated in any way with a person or business whose main activity is authorizing the impounding of vehicles. [2026 c 99 s 2; 2023 c 326 s 2. Prior: 2022 c

186 s 709; 2018 c 22 s 12; 1999 c 398 s 4; 1989 c 111 s 8; 1987 c 311 s 5; 1985 c 377 s 8.]

Effective date—2026 c 99: See note following RCW 46.55.010.

Effective date—2022 c 186: See note following RCW 47.01.071.

Explanatory statement—2018 c 22: See note following RCW 1.20.051.

RCW 46.55.085 Law enforcement impound—Unauthorized vehicle in right-of-way. (1) A law enforcement officer discovering an unauthorized vehicle left within a highway right-of-way shall attach to the vehicle a readily visible notification sticker. The sticker shall contain the following information:

(a) The date and time the sticker was attached;

(b) The identity of the officer;

(c) A statement that if the vehicle is not removed within twenty-four hours from the time the sticker is attached, the vehicle may be taken into custody and stored at the owner's expense;

(d) A statement that if the vehicle is not redeemed as provided in RCW 46.55.120, the registered owner will have committed the traffic infraction of littering—abandoned vehicle; and

(e) The address and telephone number where additional information may be obtained.

(2) If the vehicle has current Washington registration plates, the officer shall check the records to learn the identity of the last owner of record. The officer or his or her department shall make a reasonable effort to contact the owner by telephone in order to give the owner the information on the notification sticker.

(3) If the vehicle is not removed within twenty-four hours from the time the notification sticker is attached, the law enforcement officer may take custody of the vehicle and provide for the vehicle's removal to a place of safety. A vehicle that does not pose a safety hazard may remain on the roadside for more than twenty-four hours if the owner or operator is unable to remove it from the place where it is located and so notifies law enforcement officials and requests assistance.

(4) For the purposes of this section a place of safety includes the business location of a registered tow truck operator. [2010 c 8 s 9062; 2002 c 279 s 6; 1993 c 121 s 1; 1987 c 311 s 6. Formerly RCW 46.52.170 and 46.52.180.]

RCW 46.55.090 Storage, return requirements—Vehicles, personal belongings—Combination endorsement for tow truck drivers—Viewing impounded vehicle. (1) All vehicles impounded shall be taken to the nearest storage location that has been inspected and is listed on the application filed with the department.

(2) All vehicles and stored personal belongings shall be handled and returned in substantially the same condition as they existed before being towed.

(3) For purposes of this subsection [section], "personal belongings" means personal property and contents in a vehicle, with the exception of those items of personal property that are registered

or titled with the department. For a period of twenty days from impound, personal belongings shall be kept intact, and shall be returned to the vehicle's owner or agent during normal business hours upon request and presentation of a driver's license or other sufficient identification. A vehicle's owner or agent may retrieve personal belongings from the vehicle and request that the registered tow truck operator store the personal belongings for a period of thirty days from the date of signing a personal belongings storage request form. If a personal belongings storage request form is not submitted, personal belongings not claimed within twenty days from the date of the impound are considered abandoned and may be disposed of at the registered tow truck operator's discretion. If a personal belongings storage request form is submitted to the registered tow truck operator, personal belongings not claimed within thirty days of the date the personal belongings storage request form is submitted are considered abandoned and may be disposed of at the registered tow truck operator's discretion. Abandoned personal belongings may be sold at auction with the vehicle to fulfill a lien against the vehicle. The department shall adopt rules prescribing the content and format of the personal belongings storage request form.

(4) Tow truck drivers shall have a Washington state driver's license endorsed for the appropriate classification under chapter 46.25 RCW or the equivalent issued by another state.

(5) Any person who shows proof of ownership or written authorization from the impounded vehicle's registered or legal owner or the vehicle's insurer may view the vehicle without charge during normal business hours. [2019 c 401 s 1; 1995 c 360 s 4; 1989 c 178 s 25; 1987 c 311 s 7; 1985 c 377 s 9.]

Effective dates—1989 c 178: See RCW 46.25.901.

RCW 46.55.100 Impound notice—Abandoned vehicle report—Owner information, liability—Disposition report. (1) At the time of impoundment the registered tow truck operator providing the towing service shall give immediate notification, by telephone or radio, to a law enforcement agency having jurisdiction who shall maintain a log of such reports. A law enforcement agency, or a private communication center acting on behalf of a law enforcement agency, shall within six to twelve hours of the impoundment, provide to a requesting operator the name and address of the legal and registered owners of the vehicle, and the registered owner of any personal property registered or titled with the department that is attached to or contained in or on the impounded vehicle, the vehicle identification number, and any other necessary, pertinent information. The initial notice of impoundment shall be followed by a written or electronic facsimile notice within twenty-four hours. In the case of a vehicle from another state, time requirements of this subsection do not apply until the requesting law enforcement agency in this state receives the information.

(2) The operator shall immediately send an abandoned vehicle report to the department for any vehicle, and for any items of personal property registered or titled with the department, that are in the operator's possession after the one hundred twenty hour abandonment period. Such report need not be sent when the impoundment is pursuant to a writ, court order, or police hold that is not a

suspended license impound. The owner notification and abandonment process shall be initiated by the registered tow truck operator immediately following notification by a court or law enforcement officer that the writ, court order, or police hold that is not a suspended license impound is no longer in effect.

(3) Following the submittal of an abandoned vehicle report, the department shall provide the registered tow truck operator with owner information within seventy-two hours.

(4) Within fourteen days of the sale of an abandoned vehicle at public auction, the towing operator shall send a copy of the abandoned vehicle report showing the disposition of the abandoned vehicle and any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department to the department. The vehicle buyer information sent to the department on the abandoned vehicle report relieves the previous owner of the vehicle from any civil or criminal liability for the operation of the vehicle from the date of sale thereafter and transfers full liability for the vehicle to the buyer. By January 1, 2003, the department shall create a system enabling tow truck operators the option of sending the portion of the abandoned vehicle report that contains the vehicle's buyer information to the department electronically.

(5) If the operator sends an abandoned vehicle report to the department and the department finds no owner information, an operator may proceed with an inspection of the vehicle and any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department to determine whether owner identification is within the vehicle.

(6) If the operator finds no owner identification, the operator shall immediately notify the appropriate law enforcement agency, which shall search the vehicle and any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department for the vehicle identification number or other appropriate identification numbers and check the necessary records to determine the vehicle's or other property's owners. [2002 c 279 s 9; 1999 c 398 s 5; 1998 c 203 s 9; 1995 c 360 s 5; 1991 c 20 s 1; 1989 c 111 s 9; 1987 c 311 s 8; 1985 c 377 s 10.]

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

RCW 46.55.105 Responsibility of registered owner—Buyer and seller remedies. (1) Except as provided in subsection (4) of this section, the abandonment of any vehicle creates a prima facie presumption that the last registered owner of record is responsible for the abandonment and is liable for costs incurred in removing, storing, and disposing of the abandoned vehicle, less amounts realized at auction.

(2) If an unauthorized vehicle is found abandoned under subsection (1) of this section and removed at the direction of law enforcement, the last registered owner of record is guilty of the traffic infraction of "littering—abandoned vehicle," unless the vehicle is redeemed as provided in RCW 46.55.120. In addition to any other monetary penalty payable under chapter 46.63 RCW, the court shall not consider all monetary penalties as having been paid until the court is satisfied that the person found to have committed the infraction has made restitution in the amount of the deficiency remaining after disposal of the vehicle under RCW 46.55.140.

(3) A vehicle theft report filed with a law enforcement agency relieves the last registered owner of liability under subsection (2) of this section for failure to redeem the vehicle. However, the last registered owner remains liable for the costs incurred in removing, storing, and disposing of the abandoned vehicle under subsection (1) of this section. Nothing in this section limits in any way the registered owner's rights in a civil action or as restitution in a criminal action against a person responsible for the theft of the vehicle.

(4) Properly filing a report of sale or transfer regarding the vehicle involved in accordance with RCW 46.12.650 (1) through (3) relieves the last registered owner of liability under subsections (1) and (2) of this section. However, if there is a reason to believe that a report of sale has been filed in which the reported buyer did not know of the alleged transfer or did not accept the vehicle transfer, the liability remains with the last registered owner to prove the vehicle transfer was made pursuant to a legal transfer or accepted by the person reported as the new owner on the report of sale. If the date of sale as indicated on the report of sale is before the date of impoundment, the buyer identified on the latest properly filed report of sale with the department is assumed liable for the costs incurred in removing, storing, and disposing of the abandoned vehicle, less amounts realized at auction. If the date of sale is after the date of impoundment, the previous registered owner is assumed to be liable for such costs. A licensed vehicle dealer is not liable under subsections (1) and (2) of this section if the dealer, as transferee or assignee of the last registered owner of the vehicle involved, has complied with the requirements of RCW 46.70.122 upon selling or otherwise disposing of the vehicle, or if the dealer has timely filed a transitional ownership record or report of sale under RCW 46.12.660. In that case the person to whom the licensed vehicle dealer has sold or transferred the vehicle is assumed liable for the costs incurred in removing, storing, and disposing of the abandoned vehicle, less amounts realized at auction.

(5) For the purposes of reporting notices of traffic infraction to the department under RCW 46.20.270 and 46.52.101, and for purposes of reporting notices of failure to appear, respond, or comply regarding a notice of traffic infraction to the department under RCW 46.63.070(6), a traffic infraction under subsection (2) of this section is not considered to be a standing, stopping, or parking violation.

(6) A notice of infraction for a violation of this section may be filed with a court of limited jurisdiction organized under Title 3, 35, or 35A RCW, or with a violations bureau subject to the court's jurisdiction.

(7)(a) A person named as a buyer in a report of sale filed under RCW 46.12.650(3) in which there was no acceptance of the transfer has a cause of action against the person who filed the report to recover costs associated with towing, storage, auction, or any other damages incurred as a result of being named as the buyer in the report of sale, including reasonable attorneys' fees and litigation costs. The cause of action provided in this subsection (7)(a) is in addition to any other remedy available to the person at law or in equity.

(b) A person named as a seller in a report of sale filed under RCW 46.12.650(3) in which the named buyer falsely alleges that there was no acceptance of the transfer has a cause of action against the named buyer to recover damages incurred as a result of the allegation,

including reasonable attorneys' fees and litigation costs. The cause of action in this subsection (7)(b) is in addition to any other remedy available to the person at law or in equity. [2016 c 86 s 2; 2010 c 161 s 1119; 2002 c 279 s 10; 1999 c 86 s 5; 1998 c 203 s 2; 1995 c 219 s 4; 1993 c 314 s 1.]

Effective date—Intent—Legislation to reconcile chapter 161, Laws of 2010 and other amendments made during the 2010 legislative session—2010 c 161: See notes following RCW 46.04.013.

Finding—1998 c 203: "The legislature finds that the license to drive a motor vehicle on the public highways is suspended or revoked in order to protect public safety following a driver's failure to comply with the laws of this state. Over six hundred persons are killed in traffic accidents in Washington annually, and more than eighty-four thousand persons are injured. It is estimated that of the three million four hundred thousand drivers' licenses issued to citizens of Washington, more than two hundred sixty thousand are suspended or revoked at any given time. Suspended drivers are more likely to be involved in causing traffic accidents, including fatal accidents, than properly licensed drivers, and pose a serious threat to the lives and property of Washington residents. Statistics show that suspended drivers are three times more likely to kill or seriously injure others in the commission of traffic felony offenses than are validly licensed drivers. In addition to not having a driver's license, most such drivers also lack required liability insurance, increasing the financial burden upon other citizens through uninsured losses and higher insurance costs for validly licensed drivers. Because of the threat posed by suspended drivers, all registered owners of motor vehicles in Washington have a duty to not allow their vehicles to be driven by a suspended driver.

Despite the existence of criminal penalties for driving with a suspended or revoked license, an estimated seventy-five percent of these drivers continue to drive anyway. Existing sanctions are not sufficient to deter or prevent persons with a suspended or revoked license from driving. It is common for suspended drivers to resume driving immediately after being stopped, cited, and released by a police officer and to continue to drive while a criminal prosecution for suspended driving is pending. More than half of all suspended drivers charged with the crime of driving while suspended or revoked fail to appear for court hearings. Vehicle impoundment will provide an immediate consequence which will increase deterrence and reduce unlawful driving by preventing a suspended driver access to that vehicle. Vehicle impoundment will also provide an appropriate measure of accountability for registered owners who permit suspended drivers to drive their vehicles. Impoundment of vehicles driven by suspended drivers has been shown to reduce future driving while suspended or revoked offenses for up to two years afterwards, and the recidivism rate for drivers whose cars were not impounded was one hundred percent higher than for drivers whose cars were impounded. In order to adequately protect public safety and to enforce the state's driver licensing laws, it is necessary to authorize the impoundment of any vehicle when it is found to be operated by a driver with a suspended or revoked license in violation of RCW 46.20.342 and 46.20.420. The impoundment of a vehicle operated in violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.420 is intended to be a civil in rem action against the vehicle

in order to remove it from the public highways and reduce the risk posed to traffic safety by a vehicle accessible to a driver who is reasonably believed to have violated these laws." [1998 c 203 s 1.]

Suspension of driver's license for failure to respond to notice of traffic infraction: RCW 46.20.289.

RCW 46.55.110 Notice to legal and registered owners. (1)(a) When an unauthorized vehicle is impounded, the impounding towing operator shall notify the legal and registered owners of the impoundment of the unauthorized vehicle and the owners of any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department. The notification shall be sent by first-class mail within twenty-four hours after the impoundment to the last known registered and legal owners of the vehicle, and the owners of any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department, as provided by the law enforcement agency, and shall inform the owners of the identity of the person or agency authorizing the impound.

(b) The notification shall include the name of the impounding tow firm, its address, and telephone number. The notice shall also include the location, time of the impound, and by whose authority the vehicle was impounded. The notice shall also include the written notice of the right of redemption and opportunity for a hearing to contest the validity of the impoundment pursuant to RCW 46.55.120.

(c) The notification must include a notice that the registered tow truck operator will store personal belongings found in the vehicle at no cost if the vehicle's owner or agent is present to retrieve the personal belongings from the vehicle and sign a personal belongings storage request form before the date of auction. If the vehicle's owner calls a registered tow truck operator to inquire about the impounded vehicle, the registered tow truck operator shall inform the owner of the owner's ability to retrieve any personal belongings from the vehicle and to request the registered tow truck operator to store the personal belongings by signing a personal belongings storage request form before the date of auction. Registered tow truck operators shall store personal belongings at no cost for thirty days from the date the personal belongings are removed from the vehicle by the owner and the vehicle's owner or agent has signed a personal belongings storage request form. Registered tow truck operators shall maintain a record of any signed personal belongings storage request form.

(2) In addition, if a suspended license impound has been ordered, the notice must state the length of the impound, the requirement of the posting of a security deposit to ensure payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage, notification that if the security deposit is not posted the vehicle will immediately be processed and sold at auction as an abandoned vehicle, and the requirements set out in RCW 46.55.120(1)(c) regarding the payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage as well as providing proof of satisfaction of any penalties, fines, or forfeitures before redemption. The notice must also state that the registered owner is ineligible to purchase the vehicle at the abandoned vehicle auction, if held.

(3) In the case of an abandoned vehicle, or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, within twenty-four hours after receiving information on the legal and registered owners from the department through the abandoned vehicle

report, the tow truck operator shall send by first-class mail a notice of custody and sale to the legal and registered owners and of the penalties for the traffic infraction littering—abandoned vehicle. The notice must include a notice that the registered tow truck operator will store personal belongings found in the vehicle at no cost if the vehicle's owner or agent is present to retrieve the personal belongings from the vehicle and sign a personal belongings storage request form before the date of auction. The tow truck operator shall obtain a certificate of mailing from the United States postal service when notice is mailed.

(4) If the date on which a notice required by subsection (3) of this section is to be mailed falls upon a Saturday, Sunday, or a postal holiday, the notice may be mailed on the next day that is neither a Saturday, Sunday, nor a postal holiday.

(5) No notices need be sent to the legal or registered owners of an impounded vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, if the vehicle or personal property has been redeemed. [2019 c 401 s 2; 2017 c 43 s 1; 2002 c 279 s 11; 1999 c 398 s 6; 1998 c 203 s 3; 1995 c 360 s 6; 1989 c 111 s 10; 1987 c 311 s 9; 1985 c 377 s 11.]

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

RCW 46.55.113 Removal by police officer—Definition. (1) Whenever the driver of a vehicle is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345, the vehicle is subject to summary impoundment, pursuant to the terms and conditions of an applicable local ordinance or state agency rule at the direction of a law enforcement officer.

(2) In addition, a police officer may take custody of a vehicle, at his or her discretion, and provide for its prompt removal to a place of safety under any of the following circumstances:

(a) Whenever a police officer finds a vehicle standing upon the roadway in violation of any of the provisions of RCW 46.61.560, the officer may provide for the removal of the vehicle or require the driver or other person in charge of the vehicle to move the vehicle to a position off the roadway;

(b) Whenever a police officer finds a vehicle unattended upon a highway where the vehicle constitutes an obstruction to traffic or jeopardizes public safety;

(c) Whenever a police officer finds an unattended vehicle at the scene of an accident or when the driver of a vehicle involved in an accident is physically or mentally incapable of deciding upon steps to be taken to protect his or her property;

(d) Whenever the driver of a vehicle is arrested and taken into custody by a police officer;

(e) Whenever the driver of a vehicle is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.61.502 or 46.61.504;

(f) Whenever a police officer discovers a vehicle that the officer determines to be a stolen vehicle;

(g) Whenever a vehicle without a special license plate, placard, or decal indicating that the vehicle is being used to transport a person with disabilities under RCW 46.19.010 is parked in a stall or space clearly and conspicuously marked under RCW 46.61.581 which space is provided on private property without charge or on public property;

(h) Upon determining that a person is operating a motor vehicle without a valid and, if required, a specially endorsed driver's license or with a license that has been expired for 90 days or more;

(i) When a vehicle is illegally occupying a truck, commercial loading zone, restricted parking zone, bus, loading, hooded-meter, taxi, street construction or maintenance, or other similar zone where, by order of the director of transportation or chiefs of police or fire or their designees, parking is limited to designated classes of vehicles or is prohibited during certain hours, on designated days or at all times, if the zone has been established with signage for at least 24 hours and where the vehicle is interfering with the proper and intended use of the zone. Signage must give notice to the public that a vehicle will be removed if illegally parked in the zone;

(j) When a vehicle with an expired registration of more than 45 days is parked on a public street;

(k) Upon determining that a person restricted to use of only a motor vehicle equipped with a functioning ignition interlock device is operating a motor vehicle that is not equipped with such a device in violation of RCW 46.20.740(2);

(l) Whenever the driver of a vehicle is arrested for illegal racing conduct in violation of RCW 46.61.500 or 46.61.530 or a comparable municipal ordinance.

(3) When an arrest is made for a violation of RCW 46.20.342, if the vehicle is a commercial vehicle or farm transport vehicle and the driver of the vehicle is not the owner of the vehicle, before the summary impoundment directed under subsection (1) of this section, the police officer shall attempt in a reasonable and timely manner to contact the owner of the vehicle and may release the vehicle to the owner if the owner is reasonably available, as long as the owner was not in the vehicle at the time of the stop and arrest and the owner has not received a prior release under this subsection or RCW 46.55.120(1)(b)(ii).

(4) The additional procedures outlined in RCW 46.55.360 apply to any impoundment of a vehicle under subsection (2)(e) of this section.

(5) Nothing in this section may derogate from the powers of police officers under the common law. For the purposes of this section, a place of safety may include the business location of a registered tow truck operator.

(6) For purposes of this section "farm transport vehicle" means a motor vehicle owned by a farmer and that is being actively used in the transportation of the farmer's or another farmer's farm, orchard, aquatic farm, or dairy products, including livestock and plant or animal wastes, from point of production to market or disposal, or supplies or commodities to be used on the farm, orchard, aquatic farm, or dairy, and that has a gross vehicle weight rating of 7,258 kilograms (16,001 pounds) or more. [2023 c 283 s 6. Prior: 2020 c 330 s 13; 2020 c 117 s 2; 2011 c 167 s 6; (2011 c 167 s 5 expired July 1, 2011); 2010 c 161 s 1120; prior: 2007 c 242 s 1; 2007 c 86 s 1; 2005 c 390 s 5; prior: 2003 c 178 s 1; 2003 c 177 s 1; 1998 c 203 s 4; 1997 c 66 s 7; 1996 c 89 s 1; 1994 c 275 s 32; 1987 c 311 s 10. Formerly RCW 46.61.565.]

Effective date—2023 c 283: See note following RCW 46.04.367.

Finding—Intent—2020 c 117: "The legislature enacted "Hailey's law" in 2011, which requires impoundment of a vehicle when the driver

is arrested for driving or being in physical control of the vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and also prevents the impaired driver from redeeming the impounded vehicle for a period of twelve hours. In its findings, the legislature reasoned that vehicle impoundment both increases deterrence and prevents an impaired driver from accessing the vehicle for a specified time. In addition, it noted that vehicle impoundment provides an appropriate measure of accountability for registered owners who allow impaired drivers to drive or control their vehicles, but it also allows the registered owners to redeem their vehicles once impounded. The legislature additionally found that any inconvenience on a registered owner is outweighed by the need to protect the public.

The Washington state supreme court recently decided in *State v. Villela* that the mandatory impoundment component of the statute violates the state Constitution. In coming to this conclusion, the court determined that the Constitution requires that the arresting officer make a discretionary determination that impoundment is reasonable and that there are no reasonable alternatives to impoundment.

The legislature finds that, even without mandatory impoundment in every case, there are still many circumstances in which an officer making an arrest for impaired driving or physical control of a vehicle while under the influence will determine that impoundment is reasonable under the circumstances and within the constitutional limitations. In such cases, it is still appropriate and necessary for the protection of the public to prevent redemption of the impounded vehicle for a minimum of twelve hours. To this end, the legislature intends to clarify that, in cases in which a vehicle is lawfully impounded following the driver's arrest for impaired driving or physical control of a vehicle while under the influence, the twelve hour restriction on redemption of the vehicle still applies." [2020 c 117 s 1.]

Effective date—2011 c 167 s 6: "Section 6 of this act takes effect July 1, 2011." [2011 c 167 s 8.]

Effective date—2011 c 167 s 5: "Section 5 of this act expires July 1, 2011." [2011 c 167 s 9.]

Short title—2011 c 167: See note following RCW 46.55.360.

Effective date—Intent—Legislation to reconcile chapter 161, Laws of 2010 and other amendments made during the 2010 legislative session—2010 c 161: See notes following RCW 46.04.013.

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

Short title—Effective date—1994 c 275: See notes following RCW 46.04.015.

Intent—1984 c 154: "The legislature intends to extend special parking privileges to persons with disabilities that substantially impair mobility." [1984 c 154 s 1.]

Application—1984 c 154: "This act applies to special license plates, cards, or decals issued after June 7, 1984. Nothing in this

act invalidates special license plates, cards, or decals issued before June 7, 1984." [1984 c 154 s 9.]

Severability—1984 c 154: "If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1984 c 154 s 10.]

RCW 46.55.115 State patrol—Appointment of towing operators—Lien for costs—Appeal. ***(Effective until July 1, 2027.)*** The Washington state patrol, under its authority to remove vehicles from the highway, may remove the vehicles directly, through towing operators appointed by the state patrol and called on a rotational or other basis, through contracts with towing operators, or by a combination of these methods. When removal is to be accomplished through a towing operator on a noncontractual basis, the state patrol may appoint any towing operator for this purpose upon the application of the operator. Each appointment shall be contingent upon the submission of an application to the state patrol and the making of subsequent reports in such form and frequency and compliance with such standards of equipment, performance, pricing, and practices as may be required by rule of the state patrol.

An appointment may be rescinded by the state patrol upon evidence that the appointed towing operator is not complying with the laws or rules relating to the removal and storage of vehicles from the highway. The state patrol may not rescind an appointment merely because a registered tow truck operator negotiates a different rate for voluntary, owner-requested towing than for involuntary towing under this chapter. The costs of removal and storage of vehicles under this section shall be paid by the owner or driver of the vehicle and shall be a lien upon the vehicle until paid, unless the removal is determined to be invalid.

Rules promulgated under this section shall be binding only upon those towing operators appointed by the state patrol for the purpose of performing towing services at the request of the Washington state patrol. Any person aggrieved by a decision of the state patrol made under this section may appeal the decision under chapter 34.05 RCW. [1993 c 121 s 2; 1987 c 330 s 744; 1979 ex.s. c 178 s 22; 1977 ex.s. c 167 s 5. Formerly RCW 46.61.567.]

Construction—Application of rules—Severability—1987 c 330: See notes following RCW 28B.12.050.

Severability—1979 ex.s. c 178: See note following RCW 46.61.590.

RCW 46.55.115 State patrol—Appointment of towing operators—Lien for costs—Appeal. ***(Effective July 1, 2027.)***

The Washington state patrol, under its authority to remove vehicles from the highway, may remove the vehicles directly, through towing operators appointed by the state patrol and called on a rotational or other basis, through contracts with towing operators, or by a combination of these methods. When removal is to be accomplished through a towing operator on a noncontractual basis, the state patrol may appoint any towing operator for this purpose upon the application

of the operator. Each appointment shall be contingent upon the submission of an application to the state patrol and the making of subsequent reports in such form and frequency and compliance with such standards of equipment, performance, pricing, and practices as may be required by rule of the state patrol.

An appointment may be rescinded by the state patrol upon evidence that the appointed towing operator is not complying with the laws or rules relating to the removal and storage of vehicles from the highway. The state patrol may not rescind an appointment merely because a registered tow truck operator negotiates a different rate for voluntary, owner-requested towing than for involuntary towing under this chapter. The costs of removal and storage of vehicles under this section shall be paid by the owner or driver of the vehicle and shall be a lien upon the vehicle until paid, unless the removal is determined to be invalid or the registered tow truck operator releases the vehicle under the program established in RCW 46.55.700.

Rules promulgated under this section shall be binding only upon those towing operators appointed by the state patrol for the purpose of performing towing services at the request of the Washington state patrol. Any person aggrieved by a decision of the state patrol made under this section may appeal the decision under chapter 34.05 RCW. [2025 c 417 s 1308; 1993 c 121 s 2; 1987 c 330 s 744; 1979 ex.s. c 178 s 22; 1977 ex.s. c 167 s 5. Formerly RCW 46.61.567.]

Reviser's note: The effective date in section 601 was changed from February 1, 2026, to July 1, 2027, by 2026 c 255. 2026 c 255 s 601 took effect March 31, 2026.

Effective date—2026 c 255; 2025 c 417 ss 1307-1309: See note following RCW 46.55.700.

Findings—Intent—2025 c 417: See note following RCW 82.38.030.

Construction—Application of rules—Severability—1987 c 330: See notes following RCW 28B.12.050.

Severability—1979 ex.s. c 178: See note following RCW 46.61.590.

RCW 46.55.117 Impounds under RCW 64.44.050. An impound under RCW 64.44.050 shall not be considered an impound under this chapter. A tow [truck] operator who contracts with a law enforcement agency for transporting a vehicle impounded under RCW 64.44.050 shall only remove the vehicle to a secure public facility, and is not required to store or dispose of the vehicle. The vehicle shall remain in the care, custody, and control of the law enforcement agency to be demolished, disposed of, or decontaminated as provided under RCW 64.44.050. The law enforcement agency shall pay for all costs incurred as a result of the towing if the vehicle owner does not pay within thirty days. The law enforcement agency may seek reimbursement from the owner. [2008 c 201 s 3.]

RCW 46.55.118 Rate, fee limitations for certain private impounds. (1) For a private impound performed by any registered tow truck operator using tow trucks classified by the Washington state

patrol by rule under RCW 46.55.050(1) as class A, class E, or class D only, the following limitations apply:

(a) The maximum towing hourly rate listed on the fee schedule filed with the department under RCW 46.55.063(1) may not exceed one hundred thirty-five percent of the maximum hourly rate for a class A tow truck at the time of filing as negotiated by the Washington state patrol, pursuant to rule, and contained in the letter of contractual agreement and letter of appointment authorizing a registered tow truck operator to respond to state patrol-originated calls.

(b) The maximum daily storage rate listed on the fee schedule filed with the department under RCW 46.55.063(1) may not exceed one hundred thirty-five percent of the maximum daily storage rate for an impound at the time of filing as negotiated by the Washington state patrol, pursuant to rule, and contained in the letter of contractual agreement and letter of appointment authorizing a registered tow truck operator to respond to state patrol-originated calls.

(c) The maximum after-hours release fee listed on the fee schedule filed with the department under RCW 46.55.063(1) may not exceed one hundred percent of the maximum after-hours release fee for an impound at the time of filing as negotiated by the Washington state patrol, pursuant to rule, and contained in the letter of contractual agreement and letter of appointment authorizing a registered tow truck operator to respond to state patrol-originated calls.

(2) The limitations set forth in subsection (1) of this section apply to all registered tow truck operators whether or not they hold, have applied for, or received letters of appointment from the Washington state patrol to respond to state patrol-originated calls.

(3) The limitations set forth in subsection (1) of this section do not apply to:

(a) Any other classes of tow trucks classified by the Washington state patrol by rule under RCW 46.55.050(1); or

(b) Law enforcement impounds or private voluntary towing.

(4) The limitations set forth in subsection (1) of this section only apply if the vehicle is parked and upright, has all its wheels and tires attached, does not have a broken axle, and has not been involved in an accident at the location from which it is being impounded.

(5) This section does not affect the authority of any city, town, or county to enforce, maintain, or amend any ordinance, enacted prior to January 1, 2013, and valid under state law in existence at the time of its enactment, that regulates maximum allowable rates and related charges for private impounds by registered tow truck operators. [2013 c 37 s 2.]

Findings—2013 c 37: "The legislature finds that the use of a motor vehicle is often a necessity for residents' livelihood and families. Therefore, the legislature finds it is important for the public to know what the charges and fees will be for the private impound of cars and other vehicles parked on private property, and that those charges should be reasonable to ensure that residents may retrieve impounded vehicles." [2013 c 37 s 1.]

REDEMPTION RIGHTS AND HEARING PROCEDURES

RCW 46.55.120 Redemption of vehicles—Sale of unredeemed property—Improper impoundment. ***(Effective until July 1, 2027.)***

(1)(a) Vehicles or other items of personal property registered or titled with the department that are impounded by registered tow truck operators pursuant to RCW 46.55.080, 46.55.085, 46.55.113, or 9A.88.140 may be redeemed only by the following persons or entities:

(i) The legal owner;

(ii) The registered owner;

(iii) A person authorized in writing by the registered owner;

(iv) The vehicle's insurer or a vendor working on behalf of the vehicle's insurer;

(v) A third-party insurer that has a duty to repair or replace the vehicle, has obtained consent from the registered owner or the owner's agent to move the vehicle, and has documented that consent in the insurer's claim file, or a vendor working on behalf of a third-party insurer that has received such consent; provided, however, that at all times the registered owner must be granted access to and may reclaim possession of the vehicle. For the purposes of this subsection, "owner's agent" means the legal owner of the vehicle, a driver in possession of the vehicle with the registered owner's permission, or an adult member of the registered owner's family;

(vi) A person who is determined and verified by the operator to have the permission of the registered owner of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department;

(vii) A person who has purchased a vehicle or item of personal property registered or titled with the department from the registered owner who produces proof of ownership or written authorization and signs a receipt therefor; or

(viii) If (a)(i) through (vii) of this subsection do not apply, a person, who is known to the registered or legal owner of a motorcycle or moped, as each are defined in chapter 46.04 RCW, that was towed from the scene of an accident, may redeem the motorcycle or moped as a bailment in accordance with RCW 46.55.125 while the registered or legal owner is admitted as a patient in a hospital due to the accident.

(b) In addition, a vehicle impounded because the operator is in violation of RCW 46.20.342(1)(c) shall not be released until a person eligible to redeem it under (a) of this subsection satisfies the requirements of (f) of this subsection, including paying all towing, removal, and storage fees, notwithstanding the fact that the hold was ordered by a government agency. If the department's records show that the operator has been convicted of a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or a similar local ordinance within the past five years, the vehicle may be held for up to thirty days at the written direction of the agency ordering the vehicle impounded. A vehicle impounded because the operator is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 may be released only pursuant to a written order from the agency that ordered the vehicle impounded or from the court having jurisdiction. An agency shall issue a written order to release pursuant to a provision of an applicable state agency rule or local ordinance authorizing release on the basis of the following:

(i) Economic or personal hardship to the spouse of the operator, taking into consideration public safety factors, including the operator's criminal history and driving record; or

(ii) The owner of the vehicle was not the driver, the owner did not know that the driver's license was suspended or revoked, and the

owner has not received a prior release under this subsection or RCW 46.55.113(3).

In order to avoid discriminatory application, other than for the reasons for release set forth in (b)(i) and (ii) of this subsection, an agency shall, under a provision of an applicable state agency rule or local ordinance, deny release in all other circumstances without discretion.

If a vehicle is impounded because the operator is in violation of RCW 46.20.342(1) (a) or (b), the vehicle may be held for up to thirty days at the written direction of the agency ordering the vehicle impounded. However, if the department's records show that the operator has been convicted of a violation of RCW 46.20.342(1) (a) or (b) or a similar local ordinance within the past five years, the vehicle may be held at the written direction of the agency ordering the vehicle impounded for up to sixty days, and for up to ninety days if the operator has two or more such prior offenses. If a vehicle is impounded because the operator is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342, the vehicle may not be released until a person eligible to redeem it under (a) of this subsection satisfies the requirements of (f) of this subsection, including paying all towing, removal, and storage fees, notwithstanding the fact that the hold was ordered by a government agency.

(c) If the vehicle is directed to be held for a suspended license impound, a person who desires to redeem the vehicle at the end of the period of impound shall within five days of the impound at the request of the tow truck operator pay a security deposit to the tow truck operator of not more than one-half of the applicable impound storage rate for each day of the proposed suspended license impound. The tow truck operator shall credit this amount against the final bill for removal, towing, and storage upon redemption. The tow truck operator may accept other sufficient security in lieu of the security deposit. If the person desiring to redeem the vehicle does not pay the security deposit or provide other security acceptable to the tow truck operator, the tow truck operator may process and sell at auction the vehicle as an abandoned vehicle within the normal time limits set out in RCW 46.55.130(1). The security deposit required by this section may be paid and must be accepted at any time up to twenty-four hours before the beginning of the auction to sell the vehicle as abandoned. The registered owner is not eligible to purchase the vehicle at the auction, and the tow truck operator shall sell the vehicle to the highest bidder who is not the registered owner.

(d) Notwithstanding (c) of this subsection, a rental car business may immediately redeem a rental vehicle it owns by payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage, whereupon the vehicle will not be held for a suspended license impound.

(e) Notwithstanding (c) of this subsection, a motor vehicle dealer or lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle may redeem or lawfully repossess a vehicle immediately by payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage, whereupon the vehicle will not be held for a suspended license impound. A motor vehicle dealer or lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle may not knowingly and intentionally engage in collusion with a registered owner to repossess and then return or resell a vehicle to the registered owner in an attempt to avoid a suspended license impound. However, this provision does not preclude a vehicle dealer or a lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle from repossessing the vehicle and then selling, leasing, or otherwise disposing of it in

accordance with chapter 62A.9A RCW, including providing redemption rights to the debtor under RCW 62A.9A-623. If the debtor is the registered owner of the vehicle, the debtor's right to redeem the vehicle under chapter 62A.9A RCW is conditioned upon the debtor obtaining and providing proof from the impounding authority or court having jurisdiction that any fines, penalties, and forfeitures owed by the registered owner, as a result of the suspended license impound, have been paid, and proof of the payment must be tendered to the vehicle dealer or lender at the time the debtor tenders all other obligations required to redeem the vehicle. Vehicle dealers or lenders are not liable for damages if they rely in good faith on an order from the impounding agency or a court in releasing a vehicle held under a suspended license impound.

(f) The vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department shall be released upon the presentation to any person having custody of the vehicle of commercially reasonable tender sufficient to cover the costs of towing, storage, or other services rendered during the course of towing, removing, impounding, or storing any such vehicle, with credit being given for the amount of any security deposit paid under (c) of this subsection. In addition, if a vehicle is impounded because the operator was arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345 and was being operated by the registered owner when it was impounded under local ordinance or agency rule, it must not be released to any person until the registered owner establishes with the agency that ordered the vehicle impounded or the court having jurisdiction that any penalties, fines, or forfeitures owed by him or her have been satisfied. Registered tow truck operators are not liable for damages if they rely in good faith on an order from the impounding agency or a court in releasing a vehicle held under a suspended license impound. Commercially reasonable tender shall include, without limitation, cash, major bank credit cards issued by financial institutions, or personal checks drawn on Washington state branches of financial institutions if accompanied by two pieces of valid identification, one of which may be required by the operator to have a photograph. If the towing firm cannot determine through the customer's bank or a check verification service that the presented check would be paid by the bank or guaranteed by the service, the towing firm may refuse to accept the check. Any person who stops payment on a personal check or credit card, or does not make restitution within ten days from the date a check becomes insufficient due to lack of funds, to a towing firm that has provided a service pursuant to this section or in any other manner defrauds the towing firm in connection with services rendered pursuant to this section shall be liable for damages in the amount of twice the towing and storage fees, plus costs and reasonable attorney's fees.

(2)(a) The registered tow truck operator shall give to each person who seeks to redeem an impounded vehicle, or item of personal property registered or titled with the department, written notice of the right of redemption and opportunity for a hearing, which notice shall be accompanied by a form to be used for requesting a hearing, the name of the person or agency authorizing the impound, and a copy of the towing and storage invoice. The registered tow truck operator shall maintain a record evidenced by the redeeming person's signature that such notification was provided.

(b) Any person seeking to redeem an impounded vehicle under this section has a right to a hearing in the district or municipal court for the jurisdiction in which the vehicle was impounded to contest the

validity of the impoundment or the amount of towing and storage charges. The district court has jurisdiction to determine the issues involving all impoundments including those authorized by the state or its agents. The municipal court has jurisdiction to determine the issues involving impoundments authorized by agents of the municipality. Any request for a hearing shall be made in writing on the form provided for that purpose and must be received by the appropriate court within ten days of the date the opportunity was provided for in (a) of this subsection and more than five days before the date of the auction. At the time of the filing of the hearing request, the petitioner shall pay to the court clerk a filing fee in the same amount required for the filing of a suit in district court. If the hearing request is not received by the court within the ten-day period, the right to a hearing is waived and the registered owner is liable for any towing, storage, or other impoundment charges permitted under this chapter. Upon receipt of a timely hearing request, the court shall proceed to hear and determine the validity of the impoundment.

(3)(a) The court, within five days after the request for a hearing, shall notify the registered tow truck operator, the person requesting the hearing if not the owner, the registered and legal owners of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, and the person or agency authorizing the impound in writing of the hearing date and time.

(b) At the hearing, the person or persons requesting the hearing may produce any relevant evidence to show that the impoundment, towing, or storage fees charged were not proper. The court may consider a written report made under oath by the officer who authorized the impoundment in lieu of the officer's personal appearance at the hearing.

(c) At the conclusion of the hearing, the court shall determine whether the impoundment was proper, whether the towing or storage fees charged were in compliance with the posted rates, and who is responsible for payment of the fees. The court may not adjust fees or charges that are in compliance with the posted or contracted rates.

(d) If the impoundment is found proper, the impoundment, towing, and storage fees as permitted under this chapter together with court costs shall be assessed against the person or persons requesting the hearing, unless the operator did not have a signed and valid impoundment authorization from a private property owner or an authorized agent.

(e) If the impoundment is determined to be in violation of this chapter, then the registered and legal owners of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department shall bear no impoundment, towing, or storage fees, and any security shall be returned or discharged as appropriate, and the person or agency who authorized the impoundment shall be liable for any towing, storage, or other impoundment fees permitted under this chapter. The court shall enter judgment in favor of the registered tow truck operator against the person or agency authorizing the impound for the impoundment, towing, and storage fees paid. In addition, the court shall enter judgment in favor of the registered and legal owners of the vehicle, or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, for the amount of the filing fee required by law for the impound hearing petition as well as reasonable damages for loss of the use of the vehicle during the time the same was impounded against the person or agency authorizing the impound. However, if an

impoundment arising from an alleged violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345 is determined to be in violation of this chapter, then the law enforcement officer directing the impoundment and the government employing the officer are not liable for damages if the officer relied in good faith and without gross negligence on the records of the department in ascertaining that the operator of the vehicle had a suspended or revoked driver's license. If any judgment entered is not paid within fifteen days of notice in writing of its entry, the court shall award reasonable attorneys' fees and costs against the defendant in any action to enforce the judgment. Notice of entry of judgment may be made by registered or certified mail, and proof of mailing may be made by affidavit of the party mailing the notice. Notice of the entry of the judgment shall read essentially as follows:

TO: . . . . . .
YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED JUDGMENT was entered against you in the . . . . . Court located at . . . . . in the sum of $. . . . . ., in an action entitled . . . . . ., Case No. . . . . YOU ARE FURTHER NOTIFIED that attorneys fees and costs will be awarded against you under RCW . . . if the judgment is not paid within 15 days of the date of this notice.
DATED this . . . . day of . . . . . ., (year) . . .
Signature . . . . . .
Typed name and address
of party mailing notice

(4) Any impounded abandoned vehicle or item of personal property registered or titled with the department that is not redeemed within fifteen days of mailing of the notice of custody and sale as required by RCW 46.55.110(3) shall be sold at public auction in accordance with all the provisions and subject to all the conditions of RCW 46.55.130. A vehicle or item of personal property registered or titled with the department may be redeemed at any time before the start of the auction upon payment of the applicable towing and storage fees. [2017 c 152 s 1; 2013 c 150 s 1; 2009 c 387 s 3; 2004 c 250 s 1; 2003 c 177 s 2; 2000 c 193 s 1. Prior: 1999 c 398 s 7; 1999 c 327 s 5; 1998 c 203 s 5; 1996 c 89 s 2; 1995 c 360 s 7; 1993 c 121 s 3; 1989 c 111 s 11; 1987 c 311 s 12; 1985 c 377 s 12.]

Short title—2017 c 152: See note following RCW 46.55.125.

Findings—Intent—1999 c 327: See note following RCW 9A.88.130.

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

RCW 46.55.120 Redemption of vehicles—Sale of unredeemed property—Improper impoundment. ***(Effective July 1, 2027.)***

(1)(a) Vehicles or other items of personal property registered or titled with the department that are impounded by registered tow truck operators pursuant to RCW 46.55.080, 46.55.085, 46.55.113, or 9A.88.140 may be redeemed only by the following persons or entities:

(i) The legal owner;

(ii) The registered owner;

(iii) A person authorized in writing by the registered owner;

(iv) The vehicle's insurer or a vendor working on behalf of the vehicle's insurer;

(v) A third-party insurer that has a duty to repair or replace the vehicle, has obtained consent from the registered owner or the owner's agent to move the vehicle, and has documented that consent in the insurer's claim file, or a vendor working on behalf of a third-party insurer that has received such consent; provided, however, that at all times the registered owner must be granted access to and may reclaim possession of the vehicle. For the purposes of this subsection, "owner's agent" means the legal owner of the vehicle, a driver in possession of the vehicle with the registered owner's permission, or an adult member of the registered owner's family;

(vi) A person who is determined and verified by the operator to have the permission of the registered owner of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department;

(vii) A person who has purchased a vehicle or item of personal property registered or titled with the department from the registered owner who produces proof of ownership or written authorization and signs a receipt therefor; or

(viii) If (a)(i) through (vii) of this subsection do not apply, a person, who is known to the registered or legal owner of a motorcycle or moped, as each are defined in chapter 46.04 RCW, that was towed from the scene of an accident, may redeem the motorcycle or moped as a bailment in accordance with RCW 46.55.125 while the registered or legal owner is admitted as a patient in a hospital due to the accident.

(b) In addition, a vehicle impounded because the operator is in violation of RCW 46.20.342(1)(c) shall not be released until a person eligible to redeem it under (a) of this subsection satisfies the requirements of (f) of this subsection, including paying all towing, removal, and storage fees, notwithstanding the fact that the hold was ordered by a government agency. If the department's records show that the operator has been convicted of a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or a similar local ordinance within the past five years, the vehicle may be held for up to 30 days at the written direction of the agency ordering the vehicle impounded. A vehicle impounded because the operator is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 may be released only pursuant to a written order from the agency that ordered the vehicle impounded or from the court having jurisdiction. An agency shall issue a written order to release pursuant to a provision of an applicable state agency rule or local ordinance authorizing release on the basis of the following:

(i) Economic or personal hardship to the spouse of the operator, taking into consideration public safety factors, including the operator's criminal history and driving record; or

(ii) The owner of the vehicle was not the driver, the owner did not know that the driver's license was suspended or revoked, and the owner has not received a prior release under this subsection or RCW 46.55.113(3).

In order to avoid discriminatory application, other than for the reasons for release set forth in (b)(i) and (ii) of this subsection, an agency shall, under a provision of an applicable state agency rule or local ordinance, deny release in all other circumstances without discretion.

If a vehicle is impounded because the operator is in violation of RCW 46.20.342(1) (a) or (b), the vehicle may be held for up to 30 days at the written direction of the agency ordering the vehicle impounded.

However, if the department's records show that the operator has been convicted of a violation of RCW 46.20.342(1) (a) or (b) or a similar local ordinance within the past five years, the vehicle may be held at the written direction of the agency ordering the vehicle impounded for up to 60 days, and for up to 90 days if the operator has two or more such prior offenses. If a vehicle is impounded because the operator is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342, the vehicle may not be released until a person eligible to redeem it under (a) of this subsection satisfies the requirements of (f) of this subsection, including paying all towing, removal, and storage fees, notwithstanding the fact that the hold was ordered by a government agency.

(c) If the vehicle is directed to be held for a suspended license impound, a person who desires to redeem the vehicle at the end of the period of impound shall within five days of the impound at the request of the tow truck operator pay a security deposit to the tow truck operator of not more than one-half of the applicable impound storage rate for each day of the proposed suspended license impound. The tow truck operator shall credit this amount against the final bill for removal, towing, and storage upon redemption. The tow truck operator may accept other sufficient security in lieu of the security deposit. If the person desiring to redeem the vehicle does not pay the security deposit or provide other security acceptable to the tow truck operator, the tow truck operator may process and sell at auction the vehicle as an abandoned vehicle within the normal time limits set out in RCW 46.55.130(1). The security deposit required by this section may be paid and must be accepted at any time up to 24 hours before the beginning of the auction to sell the vehicle as abandoned. The registered owner is not eligible to purchase the vehicle at the auction, and the tow truck operator shall sell the vehicle to the highest bidder who is not the registered owner.

(d) Notwithstanding (c) of this subsection, a rental car business may immediately redeem a rental vehicle it owns by payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage, whereupon the vehicle will not be held for a suspended license impound.

(e) Notwithstanding (c) of this subsection, a motor vehicle dealer or lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle may redeem or lawfully repossess a vehicle immediately by payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage, whereupon the vehicle will not be held for a suspended license impound. A motor vehicle dealer or lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle may not knowingly and intentionally engage in collusion with a registered owner to repossess and then return or resell a vehicle to the registered owner in an attempt to avoid a suspended license impound. However, this provision does not preclude a vehicle dealer or a lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle from repossessing the vehicle and then selling, leasing, or otherwise disposing of it in accordance with chapter 62A.9A RCW, including providing redemption rights to the debtor under RCW 62A.9A-623. If the debtor is the registered owner of the vehicle, the debtor's right to redeem the vehicle under chapter 62A.9A RCW is conditioned upon the debtor obtaining and providing proof from the impounding authority or court having jurisdiction that any fines, penalties, and forfeitures owed by the registered owner, as a result of the suspended license impound, have been paid, and proof of the payment must be tendered to the vehicle dealer or lender at the time the debtor tenders all other obligations required to redeem the vehicle. Vehicle dealers or lenders

are not liable for damages if they rely in good faith on an order from the impounding agency or a court in releasing a vehicle held under a suspended license impound.

(f) The vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department shall be released upon the presentation to any person having custody of the vehicle of commercially reasonable tender sufficient to cover the costs of towing, storage, or other services rendered during the course of towing, removing, impounding, or storing any such vehicle, with credit being given for the amount of any security deposit paid under (c) of this subsection. Alternatively, a vehicle must be released when the registered tow truck operator completes the form described in RCW 46.55.700(4) provided that the first part of the form is completed by an individual seeking the release of a vehicle. In addition, if a vehicle is impounded because the operator was arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345 and was being operated by the registered owner when it was impounded under local ordinance or agency rule, it must not be released to any person until the registered owner establishes with the agency that ordered the vehicle impounded or the court having jurisdiction that any penalties, fines, or forfeitures owed by him or her have been satisfied. Registered tow truck operators are not liable for damages if they rely in good faith on an order from the impounding agency or a court in releasing a vehicle held under a suspended license impound. Commercially reasonable tender shall include, without limitation, cash, major bank credit cards issued by financial institutions, or personal checks drawn on Washington state branches of financial institutions if accompanied by two pieces of valid identification, one of which may be required by the operator to have a photograph. If the towing firm cannot determine through the customer's bank or a check verification service that the presented check would be paid by the bank or guaranteed by the service, the towing firm may refuse to accept the check. Any person who stops payment on a personal check or credit card, or does not make restitution within 10 days from the date a check becomes insufficient due to lack of funds, to a towing firm that has provided a service pursuant to this section or in any other manner defrauds the towing firm in connection with services rendered pursuant to this section shall be liable for damages in the amount of twice the towing and storage fees, plus costs and reasonable attorney's fees.

(2)(a) The registered tow truck operator shall give to each person who seeks to redeem an impounded vehicle, or item of personal property registered or titled with the department, written notice of the right of redemption and opportunity for a hearing, which notice shall be accompanied by a form to be used for requesting a hearing, the name of the person or agency authorizing the impound, and a copy of the towing and storage invoice. The registered tow truck operator shall maintain a record evidenced by the redeeming person's signature that such notification was provided.

(b) Any person seeking to redeem an impounded vehicle under this section has a right to a hearing in the district or municipal court for the jurisdiction in which the vehicle was impounded to contest the validity of the impoundment or the amount of towing and storage charges. The district court has jurisdiction to determine the issues involving all impoundments including those authorized by the state or its agents. The municipal court has jurisdiction to determine the issues involving impoundments authorized by agents of the municipality. Any request for a hearing shall be made in writing on

the form provided for that purpose and must be received by the appropriate court within 10 days of the date the opportunity was provided for in (a) of this subsection and more than five days before the date of the auction. At the time of the filing of the hearing request, the petitioner shall pay to the court clerk a filing fee in the same amount required for the filing of a suit in district court. If the hearing request is not received by the court within the 10-day period, the right to a hearing is waived and the registered owner is liable for any towing, storage, or other impoundment charges permitted under this chapter. Upon receipt of a timely hearing request, the court shall proceed to hear and determine the validity of the impoundment.

(3)(a) The court, within five days after the request for a hearing, shall notify the registered tow truck operator, the person requesting the hearing if not the owner, the registered and legal owners of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, and the person or agency authorizing the impound in writing of the hearing date and time.

(b) At the hearing, the person or persons requesting the hearing may produce any relevant evidence to show that the impoundment, towing, or storage fees charged were not proper. The court may consider a written report made under oath by the officer who authorized the impoundment in lieu of the officer's personal appearance at the hearing.

(c) At the conclusion of the hearing, the court shall determine whether the impoundment was proper, whether the towing or storage fees charged were in compliance with the posted rates, and who is responsible for payment of the fees. The court may not adjust fees or charges that are in compliance with the posted or contracted rates.

(d) If the impoundment is found proper, the impoundment, towing, and storage fees as permitted under this chapter together with court costs shall be assessed against the person or persons requesting the hearing, unless the operator did not have a signed and valid impoundment authorization from a private property owner or an authorized agent.

(e) If the impoundment is determined to be in violation of this chapter, then the registered and legal owners of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department shall bear no impoundment, towing, or storage fees, and any security shall be returned or discharged as appropriate, and the person or agency who authorized the impoundment shall be liable for any towing, storage, or other impoundment fees permitted under this chapter. The court shall enter judgment in favor of the registered tow truck operator against the person or agency authorizing the impound for the impoundment, towing, and storage fees paid. In addition, the court shall enter judgment in favor of the registered and legal owners of the vehicle, or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, for the amount of the filing fee required by law for the impound hearing petition as well as reasonable damages for loss of the use of the vehicle during the time the same was impounded against the person or agency authorizing the impound. However, if an impoundment arising from an alleged violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345 is determined to be in violation of this chapter, then the law enforcement officer directing the impoundment and the government employing the officer are not liable for damages if the officer relied in good faith and without gross negligence on the records of the department in ascertaining that the operator of the vehicle had a

suspended or revoked driver's license. If any judgment entered is not paid within 15 days of notice in writing of its entry, the court shall award reasonable attorneys' fees and costs against the defendant in any action to enforce the judgment. Notice of entry of judgment may be made by registered or certified mail, and proof of mailing may be made by affidavit of the party mailing the notice. Notice of the entry of the judgment shall read essentially as follows:

TO: . . . . . .
YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED JUDGMENT was entered against you in the . . . . . Court located at . . . . . in the sum of $. . . . . ., in an action entitled . . . . . ., Case No. . . . . YOU ARE FURTHER NOTIFIED that attorneys fees and costs will be awarded against you under RCW . . . if the judgment is not paid within 15 days of the date of this notice.
DATED this . . . . day of . . . . . ., (year) . . .
Signature . . . . . .
Typed name and address
of party mailing notice

(4) Any impounded abandoned vehicle or item of personal property registered or titled with the department that is not redeemed within 15 days of mailing of the notice of custody and sale as required by RCW 46.55.110(3) shall be sold at public auction in accordance with all the provisions and subject to all the conditions of RCW 46.55.130. A vehicle or item of personal property registered or titled with the department may be redeemed at any time before the start of the auction either upon:

(a) Payment of the applicable towing and storage fees; or

(b) The completion of the form specified in RCW 46.55.700. [2025 c 417 s 1309; 2017 c 152 s 1; 2013 c 150 s 1; 2009 c 387 s 3; 2004 c 250 s 1; 2003 c 177 s 2; 2000 c 193 s 1. Prior: 1999 c 398 s 7; 1999 c 327 s 5; 1998 c 203 s 5; 1996 c 89 s 2; 1995 c 360 s 7; 1993 c 121 s 3; 1989 c 111 s 11; 1987 c 311 s 12; 1985 c 377 s 12.]

Reviser's note: The effective date in section 601 was changed from February 1, 2026, to July 1, 2027, by 2026 c 255. 2026 c 255 s 601 took effect March 31, 2026.

Effective date—2026 c 255; 2025 c 417 ss 1307-1309: See note following RCW 46.55.700.

Findings—Intent—2025 c 417: See note following RCW 82.38.030.

Short title—2017 c 152: See note following RCW 46.55.125.

Findings—Intent—1999 c 327: See note following RCW 9A.88.130.

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

RCW 46.55.125 Redemption of motorcycle or moped as bailment while owner hospitalized due to accident—Requirements—Declaration form. (1) Any person, who is known to the registered or legal owner of a motorcycle or moped that was towed from the scene of an accident, may redeem the motorcycle or moped as a bailment on behalf of the

registered or legal owner who is admitted as a patient in a hospital due to the accident subject to the following requirements:

(a) The eligible person must pay the costs of towing, storage, or other services rendered during the course of towing, removal, or storing of the motorcycle or moped.

(b) The eligible person must provide a valid government-issued photo identification, such as a current driver's license or state-issued identification card, military identification, or passport.

(c) The eligible person must sign a declaration on a form furnished by the department that provides:

(i) The person's name, telephone number, and physical address;

(ii) The relationship between the person and the registered or legal owner;

(iii) The name and location of the hospital where the registered or legal owner is admitted;

(iv) The address of the physical location where the motorcycle or moped will be stored for the registered or legal owner at no additional cost to the owner;

(v) A statement that the person agrees to protect the motorcycle or moped and return it to the registered or legal owner in the same form it was received when removed from the registered tow truck operator's premises; and

(vi) A statement that the person knowingly agrees to become the bailee for the motorcycle or moped.

(d) The declaration form under (c) of this subsection must be signed under penalty of perjury.

(2) The registered tow truck operator may refuse an offer to redeem under this section for good cause, which includes, but is not limited to, competing applications for redemption from persons identified under RCW 46.55.120(1)(a) or the person applying to be the bailee has been convicted of a crime of dishonesty or theft. This section does not require a registered tow truck operator to investigate or otherwise determine the criminal history or the honesty of the bailee.

(3) Any registered tow truck operator acting in good faith in compliance with this section that releases a motorcycle or moped to bailment in accordance with the requirements of this section is immune from civil liability arising out of the bailment unless the tow truck operator's act or omission constitutes gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

(4) In addition to any remedies provided by common law for bailments, a person who becomes the bailee of a motorcycle or moped under this section and fails to return the motorcycle or moped to the registered or legal owner may be charged with possession of a stolen vehicle under RCW 9A.56.068.

(5) The department must create a declaration form to be completed by individuals that identifies the required information in subsection (1)(b) and (c) of this section. The department must post the form on its website, and the form must be able to be downloaded from the department's website. [2017 c 152 s 4.]

Short title—2017 c 152: "This act may be known and cited as the Denise Chew scooter recovery act." [2017 c 152 s 5.]

RCW 46.55.130 Notice requirements—Public auction—Accumulation of storage charges. (1) If, after the expiration of fifteen days from the date of mailing of notice of custody and sale required in RCW 46.55.110(3) to the registered and legal owners, the vehicle remains unclaimed and has not been listed as a stolen vehicle, a suspended license impound has been directed but no commercially reasonable tender has been paid under RCW 46.55.120, or a person eligible to redeem under RCW 46.55.120(1)(a)(viii) has not come forth providing information that the registered or legal owner of a motorcycle or moped is an admitted patient in a hospital, the registered tow truck operator having custody of the vehicle shall conduct a sale of the vehicle at public auction after having first published a notice of the date, place, and time of the auction, and a method to contact the tow truck operator conducting the auction such as a telephone number, email address, or website, in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in which the vehicle is located not less than three days and no more than ten days before the date of the auction. For the purposes of this section, a newspaper of general circulation may be a commercial, widely circulated, free, classified advertisement circular not affiliated with the registered tow truck operator and the notice may be listed in a classification delineating "auctions" or similar language designed to attract potential bidders to the auction. The notice shall contain a notification that a public viewing period will be available before the auction and the length of the viewing period. The auction shall be held during daylight hours of a normal business day. The viewing period must be one hour if twenty-five or fewer vehicles are to be auctioned, two hours if more than twenty-five and fewer than fifty vehicles are to be auctioned, and three hours if fifty or more vehicles are to be auctioned. If the registered tow truck operator is notified that the registered or legal owner of the moped or motorcycle is an admitted patient in the hospital as evidenced by a declaration on a form authorized by the department, the registered tow truck operator may delay the auction of the moped or motorcycle for a reasonable time in a good faith effort to provide additional time for the redemption of the vehicle.

(2) The following procedures are required in any public auction of such abandoned vehicles:

(a) The auction shall be held in such a manner that all persons present are given an equal time and opportunity to bid;

(b) All bidders must be present at the time of auction unless they have submitted to the registered tow truck operator, who may or may not choose to use the preauction bid method, a written bid on a specific vehicle. Written bids may be submitted up to five days before the auction and shall clearly state which vehicle is being bid upon, the amount of the bid, and who is submitting the bid;

(c) The open bid process, including all written bids, shall be used so that everyone knows the dollar value that must be exceeded;

(d) The highest two bids received shall be recorded in written form and shall include the name, address, and telephone number of each such bidder;

(e) In case the high bidder defaults, the next bidder has the right to purchase the vehicle for the amount of his or her bid;

(f) The successful bidder shall apply for title within fifteen days;

(g) The registered tow truck operator shall post a copy of the auction procedure at the bidding site. If the bidding site is

different from the licensed office location, the operator shall post a clearly visible sign at the office location that describes in detail where the auction will be held. At the bidding site a copy of the newspaper advertisement that lists the vehicles for sale shall be posted;

(h) All surplus moneys derived from the auction after satisfaction of the registered tow truck operator's lien shall be remitted within thirty days to the department for deposit in the state motor vehicle fund. A report identifying the vehicles resulting in any surplus shall accompany the remitted funds. If the director subsequently receives a valid claim from the registered vehicle owner of record as determined by the department within one year from the date of the auction, the surplus moneys shall be remitted to such owner;

(i) If an operator receives no bid, or if the operator is the successful bidder at auction, the operator shall, within forty-five days, sell the vehicle to a licensed vehicle wrecker, hulk hauler, or scrap processor by use of the abandoned vehicle report-affidavit of sale, or the operator shall apply for title to the vehicle.

(3) A tow truck operator may refuse to accept a bid at an abandoned vehicle auction under this section for any reason in the operator's posted operating procedures and for any of the following reasons: (a) The bidder is currently indebted to the operator; (b) the operator has knowledge that the bidder has previously abandoned vehicles purchased at auction; or (c) the bidder has purchased, at auction, more than four vehicles in the last calendar year without obtaining title to any or all of the vehicles. In no case may an operator hold a vehicle for longer than ninety days without holding an auction on the vehicle, except for vehicles that are under a police or judicial hold.

(4)(a) The accumulation of storage charges applied to the lien at auction under RCW 46.55.140 may not exceed fifteen additional days from the date of receipt of the information by the operator from the department as provided by RCW 46.55.110(3) plus the storage charges accumulated prior to the receipt of the information. However, vehicles redeemed pursuant to RCW 46.55.120 prior to their sale at auction are subject to payment of all accumulated storage charges from the time of impoundment up to the time of redemption.

(b) The failure of the registered tow truck operator to comply with the time limits provided in this chapter limits the accumulation of storage charges to five days except where delay is unavoidable. Providing incorrect or incomplete identifying information to the department in the abandoned vehicle report shall be considered a failure to comply with these time limits if correct information is available. However, storage charges begin to accrue again on the date the correct and complete information is provided to the department by the registered tow truck operator. [2017 c 152 s 2; 2011 c 65 s 1; 2006 c 28 s 1; 2002 c 279 s 12; 2000 c 193 s 2; 1998 c 203 s 6; 1989 c 111 s 12; 1987 c 311 s 13; 1985 c 377 s 13.]

Short title—2017 c 152: See note following RCW 46.55.125.

Finding—1998 c 203: See note following RCW 46.55.105.

RCW 46.55.140 Operator's lien, deficiency claim, liability. (1) A registered tow truck operator who has a valid and signed impoundment authorization has a lien upon the impounded vehicle for services provided in the towing and storage of the vehicle, unless the impoundment is determined to have been invalid. The lien does not apply to personal property in or upon the vehicle that is not permanently attached to or is not an integral part of the vehicle except for items of personal property registered or titled with the department. The registered tow truck operator also has a deficiency claim against the registered owner of the vehicle for services provided in the towing and storage of the vehicle not to exceed the sum of five hundred dollars after deduction of the amount bid at auction, and for vehicles of over ten thousand pounds gross vehicle weight, the operator has a deficiency claim of one thousand dollars after deduction of the amount bid at auction, unless the impound is determined to be invalid. The limitation on towing and storage deficiency claims does not apply to an impound directed by a law enforcement officer. In no case may the cost of the auction or a buyer's fee be added to the amount charged for the vehicle at the auction, the vehicle's lien, or the overage due. A registered owner who has completed and filed with the department the report of sale as provided for in RCW 46.12.650 and has timely and properly filed the report of sale is relieved of liability under this section. The person named as the new owner of the vehicle on the timely and properly filed report of sale shall assume liability under this section.

(2) Any person who tows, removes, or otherwise disturbs any vehicle parked, stalled, or otherwise left on privately owned or controlled property, and any person owning or controlling the private property, or either of them, are liable to the owner or operator of a vehicle, or each of them, for consequential and incidental damages arising from any interference with the ownership or use of the vehicle which does not comply with the requirements of this chapter. [2010 c 161 s 1121; 1995 c 360 s 8; 1992 c 200 s 1; 1991 c 20 s 2; 1989 c 111 s 13; 1987 c 311 s 14; 1985 c 377 s 14.]

Effective date—Intent—Legislation to reconcile chapter 161, Laws of 2010 and other amendments made during the 2010 legislative session—2010 c 161: See notes following RCW 46.04.013.

RECORDS, INSPECTIONS, AND ENFORCEMENT

RCW 46.55.150 Vehicle transaction file. (1) The registered tow truck operator shall keep a transaction file on each vehicle, which shall be kept for a minimum of three years. The transaction file shall contain as a minimum those of the following items that are required at the time the vehicle is redeemed or becomes abandoned and is sold at a public auction:

(a) A signed impoundment authorization as required by RCW 46.55.080;

(b) A record of the twenty-four hour written impound notice to a law enforcement agency;

(c) A copy of the impoundment notification to registered and legal owners, sent within twenty-four hours of impoundment, that advises the owners of the address of the impounding firm, a twenty-

four hour telephone number, and the name of the person or agency under whose authority the vehicle was impounded;

(d) A copy of the abandoned vehicle report that was sent to and returned by the department;

(e) A copy and proof of mailing of the notice of custody and sale sent by the registered tow truck operator to the owners advising them they have fifteen days to redeem the vehicle before it is sold at public auction;

(f) A copy of the published notice of public auction;

(g) A copy of the affidavit of sale showing the sales date, purchaser, amount of the lien, and sale price;

(h) A record of the two highest bid offers on the vehicle, with the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the two bidders;

(i) A copy of the notice of opportunity for hearing given to those who redeem vehicles;

(j) An itemized invoice of charges against the vehicle; and

(k) Documentation of a bailment in accordance with RCW 46.55.125, if applicable.

(2)(a) The transaction file kept under subsection (1) of this section may be created and stored electronically. If the tow truck operator elects to store records electronically, the method of electronic records storage shall utilize software developed for that business purpose. This method of storage may include the use of cloud storage or another acceptable method that makes storage, retrieval, and access to the records reliable and available during normal business hours for audit or inspection by the department of licensing, the Washington state patrol, or any law enforcement agency with jurisdiction.

(b) Any electronic record created for each tow transaction must be maintained in an electronic folder labeled with the date the towing service was performed. The electronic folders must be maintained in chronological order. [2017 c 152 s 3; 2017 c 50 s 1; 1989 c 111 s 14; 1987 c 311 s 15; 1985 c 377 s 15.]

Reviser's note: This section was amended by 2017 c 50 s 1 and by 2017 c 152 s 3, each without reference to the other. Both amendments are incorporated in the publication of this section under RCW 1.12.025(2). For rule of construction, see RCW 1.12.025(1).

Short title—2017 c 152: See note following RCW 46.55.125.

RCW 46.55.160 Availability of records, equipment, and facilities for audit and inspection. Records, including any electronic records, equipment, and facilities of a registered tow truck operator shall be available during normal business hours for audit or inspection by the department of licensing, the Washington state patrol, or any law enforcement agency having jurisdiction. [2017 c 50 s 2; 1985 c 377 s 16.]

RCW 46.55.170 Complaints, where forwarded. (1) All law enforcement agencies or local licensing agencies that receive complaints involving registered tow truck operators shall forward the complaints, along with any supporting documents including all results from local investigations, to the department.

(2) Complaints involving deficiencies of equipment shall be forwarded by the department to the state patrol. [1987 c 330 s 741; 1985 c 377 s 17.]

Construction—Application of rules—Severability—1987 c 330: See notes following RCW 28B.12.050.

RCW 46.55.180 Presiding officer at licensing hearing. The director or the chief of the state patrol may use a hearing officer or administrative law judge for presiding over a hearing regarding licensing provisions under this chapter or rules adopted under it. [1989 c 111 s 15; 1987 c 330 s 742; 1985 c 377 s 18.]

Construction—Application of rules—Severability—1987 c 330: See notes following RCW 28B.12.050.

RCW 46.55.190 Rules. The director, in cooperation with the chief of the Washington state patrol, shall adopt rules that carry out the provisions and intent of this chapter. [1985 c 377 s 19.]

RCW 46.55.200 Penalties for certain acts or omissions. A registered tow truck operator's license may be denied, suspended, or revoked, or the licensee may be ordered to pay a monetary penalty of a civil nature, not to exceed one thousand dollars per violation, or the licensee may be subjected to any combination of license and monetary penalty, whenever the director has reason to believe the licensee has committed, or is at the time committing, a violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it or any other statute or rule relating to the title or disposition of vehicles or vehicle hulks, including but not limited to:

(1) Towing any abandoned vehicle without first obtaining and having in the operator's possession at all times while transporting it, appropriate evidence of ownership or an impound authorization properly executed by the private person or public official having control over the property on which the unauthorized vehicle was found;

(2) Forging the signature of the registered or legal owner on a certificate of title, or forging the signature of any authorized person on documents pertaining to unauthorized or abandoned vehicles or automobile hulks;

(3) Failing to comply with the statutes and rules relating to the processing and sale of abandoned vehicles;

(4) Failing to accept bids on any abandoned vehicle offered at public sale;

(5) Failing to transmit to the state surplus funds derived from the sale of an abandoned vehicle;

(6) Selling, disposing of, or having in his or her possession, without notifying law enforcement officials, a vehicle that he or she knows or has reason to know has been stolen or illegally appropriated without the consent of the owner;

(7) Failing to comply with the statutes and rules relating to the transfer of ownership of vehicles or other procedures after public sale; or

(8) Failing to pay any civil monetary penalty assessed by the director pursuant to this section within ten days after the assessment becomes final.

All orders by the director made under this chapter are subject to the Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 34.05 RCW. [2010 c 8 s 9063; 1989 c 111 s 16; 1985 c 377 s 20.]

RCW 46.55.210 Cease and desist order. Whenever it appears to the director that any registered tow truck operator or a person offering towing services has engaged in or is about to engage in any act or practice constituting a violation of any provision of this chapter or any rule adopted hereunder, the director may issue an order directing the operator or person to cease and desist from continuing the act or practice. Reasonable notice of and opportunity for a hearing shall be given. The director may issue a temporary order pending a hearing. The temporary order shall remain in effect until ten days after the hearing is held and shall become final if the person to whom notice is addressed does not request a hearing within fifteen days after the receipt of notice. [1987 c 311 s 17; 1985 c 377 s 21.]

RCW 46.55.220 Refusal to issue license, grounds for. If an application for a license to conduct business as a registered tow truck operator is filed by any person whose license has previously been canceled for cause by the department, or if the department is of the opinion that the application is not filed in good faith or that the application is filed by some person as a subterfuge for the real person in interest whose license has previously been canceled for cause, the department, after a hearing, of which the applicant has been given twenty days' notice in writing and at which the applicant may appear in person or by counsel and present testimony, may refuse to issue such a person a license to conduct business as a registered tow truck operator. [1987 c 311 s 18; 1985 c 377 s 22.]

JUNK VEHICLE DISPOSITION

RCW 46.55.230 Junk vehicles—Removal, disposal, sale—Penalties—Cleanup restitution payment. (1)(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any law enforcement officer having jurisdiction, or any employee or officer of a jurisdictional health department acting pursuant to RCW 70A.205.195, or any person authorized by the director shall inspect and may authorize the disposal of an abandoned junk vehicle. The person making the inspection shall record the make and vehicle identification number or license number of the vehicle if available, and shall also verify that the approximate value of the junk vehicle is equivalent only to the approximate value of the parts.

(b) A tow truck operator may authorize the disposal of an abandoned junk vehicle if the vehicle has been abandoned two or more times, the registered ownership information has not changed since the first abandonment, and the registered owner is also the legal owner.

(2) The law enforcement officer or department representative shall provide information on the vehicle's registered and legal owner to the landowner.

(3) Upon receiving information on the vehicle's registered and legal owner, the landowner shall mail a notice to the registered and legal owners shown on the records of the department. The notification shall describe the redemption procedure and the right to arrange for the removal of the vehicle.

(4) If the vehicle remains unclaimed more than fifteen days after the landowner has mailed notification to the registered and legal owner, the landowner may dispose of the vehicle or sign an affidavit of sale to be used as a title document.

(5) If no information on the vehicle's registered and legal owner is found in the records of the department, the landowner may immediately dispose of the vehicle or sign an affidavit of sale to be used as a title document.

(6) It is a gross misdemeanor for a person to abandon a junk vehicle on property. If a junk vehicle is abandoned, the vehicle's registered owner shall also pay a cleanup restitution payment equal to twice the costs incurred in the removal of the junk vehicle. The court shall distribute one-half of the restitution payment to the landowner of the property upon which the junk vehicle is located, and one-half of the restitution payment to the law enforcement agency or jurisdictional health department investigating the incident.

(7) For the purposes of this section, the term "landowner" includes a legal owner of private property, a person with possession or control of private property, or a public official having jurisdiction over public property.

(8) A person complying in good faith with the requirements of this section is immune from any liability arising out of an action taken or omission made in the compliance. [2021 c 65 s 52; 2002 c 279 s 13; 2001 c 139 s 3; 2000 c 154 s 4; 1991 c 292 s 2; 1987 c 311 s 19; 1985 c 377 s 23.]

Explanatory statement—2021 c 65: See note following RCW 53.54.030.

Severability—2000 c 154: See note following RCW 70A.200.030.

LOCAL REGULATION

RCW 46.55.240 Local ordinances—Requirements. (1) A city, town, or county that adopts an ordinance or resolution concerning unauthorized, abandoned, or impounded vehicles shall include the applicable provisions of this chapter.

(a) A city, town, or county may, by ordinance, authorize other impound situations that may arise locally upon the public right-of-way or other publicly owned or controlled property.

(b) A city, town, or county ordinance shall contain language that establishes a written form of authorization to impound, which may include a law enforcement notice of infraction or citation, clearly denoting the agency's authorization to impound.

(c) A city, town, or county may, by ordinance, provide for release of an impounded vehicle by means of a promissory note in lieu

of immediate payment, if at the time of redemption the legal or registered owner requests a hearing on the validity of the impoundment. If the municipal ordinance directs the release of an impounded vehicle before the payment of the impoundment charges, the municipality is responsible for the payment of those charges to the registered tow truck operator within thirty days of the hearing date.

(d) The hearing specified in RCW 46.55.120(2) and in this section may be conducted by an administrative hearings officer instead of in the district court. A decision made by an administrative hearing officer may be appealed to the district court for final judgment.

(2) A city, town, or county may adopt an ordinance establishing procedures for the abatement and removal as public nuisances of junk vehicles or parts thereof from private property. Costs of removal may be assessed against the registered owner of the vehicle if the identity of the owner can be determined, unless the owner in the transfer of ownership of the vehicle has complied with RCW 46.12.650, or the costs may be assessed against the owner of the property on which the vehicle is stored. A city, town, or county may also provide for the payment to the tow truck operator or wrecker as a part of a neighborhood revitalization program.

(3) Ordinances pertaining to public nuisances shall contain:

(a) A provision requiring notice to the last registered owner of record and the property owner of record that a hearing may be requested and that if no hearing is requested, the vehicle will be removed;

(b) A provision requiring that if a request for a hearing is received, a notice giving the time, location, and date of the hearing on the question of abatement and removal of the vehicle or part thereof as a public nuisance shall be mailed, by certified mail, with a five-day return receipt requested, to the owner of the land as shown on the last equalized assessment roll and to the last registered and legal owner of record unless the vehicle is in such condition that identification numbers are not available to determine ownership;

(c) A provision that the ordinance shall not apply to (i) a vehicle or part thereof that is completely enclosed within a building in a lawful manner where it is not visible from the street or other public or private property or (ii) a vehicle or part thereof that is stored or parked in a lawful manner on private property in connection with the business of a licensed dismantler or licensed vehicle dealer and is fenced according to RCW 46.80.130;

(d) A provision that the owner of the land on which the vehicle is located may appear in person at the hearing or present a written statement in time for consideration at the hearing, and deny responsibility for the presence of the vehicle on the land, with his or her reasons for the denial. If it is determined at the hearing that the vehicle was placed on the land without the consent of the landowner and that he or she has not subsequently acquiesced in its presence, then the local agency shall not assess costs of administration or removal of the vehicle against the property upon which the vehicle is located or otherwise attempt to collect the cost from the owner;

(e) A provision that after notice has been given of the intent of the city, town, or county to dispose of the vehicle and after a hearing, if requested, has been held, the vehicle or part thereof shall be removed at the request of a law enforcement officer with notice to the Washington state patrol and the department of licensing that the vehicle has been wrecked. The city, town, or county may

operate such a disposal site when its governing body determines that commercial channels of disposition are not available or are inadequate, and it may make final disposition of such vehicles or parts, or may transfer such vehicle or parts to another governmental body provided such disposal shall be only as scrap.

(4) A registered disposer under contract to a city or county for the impounding of vehicles shall comply with any administrative regulations adopted by the city or county on the handling and disposing of vehicles. [2010 c 161 s 1122; 2010 c 8 s 9064; 1994 c 176 s 2; 1991 c 292 s 3; 1989 c 111 s 17; 1987 c 311 s 20; 1985 c 377 s 24.]

Reviser's note: This section was amended by 2010 c 8 s 9064 and by 2010 c 161 s 1122, each without reference to the other. Both amendments are incorporated in the publication of this section under RCW 1.12.025(2). For rule of construction, see RCW 1.12.025(1).

Effective date—Intent—Legislation to reconcile chapter 161, Laws of 2010 and other amendments made during the 2010 legislative session—2010 c 161: See notes following RCW 46.04.013.

VEHICLE IMMOBILIZATION

RCW 46.55.300 Vehicle immobilization. (1) A property owner shall not immobilize any vehicle owned by a person other than the property owner.

(2) This section does not apply to property owned by the state or any unit of local government.

(3) A violation of this section is a gross misdemeanor. [2005 c 88 s 1.]

IMPOUNDMENT AFTER ARREST FOR DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

RCW 46.55.360 Impoundment, when required—Law enforcement powers, duties, and liability immunity—Redemption, when, by whom—Operator liability immunity—Definition. (1)(a) When a driver of a vehicle is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.61.502 or 46.61.504, or illegal racing conduct under RCW 46.61.500 or 46.61.530 or a comparable municipal ordinance, and the officer directs the impoundment of the vehicle under RCW 46.55.113(2) (e) or (l), the vehicle must be impounded and retained under the process outlined in this section. With the exception of the holds mandated under this section, the procedures for notice, redemption, storage, auction, and sale shall remain the same as for other impounded vehicles under this chapter.

(b) If the police officer directing that a vehicle be impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2) (e) or (l) has:

(i) Waited 30 minutes after the police officer contacted the police dispatcher requesting a registered tow truck operator and the tow truck responding has not arrived, or

(ii) If the police officer is presented with exigent circumstances such as being called to another incident or due to limited available resources being required to return to patrol,

the police officer may place the completed impound order and inventory inside the vehicle and secure the vehicle by closing the windows and locking the doors before leaving.

(c) If a police officer has secured the vehicle and left it pursuant to (b) of this subsection, the police officer and the government or agency employing the police officer shall not be liable for any damages to or theft of the vehicle or its contents that occur between the time the officer leaves and the time that the registered tow truck operator takes custody of the vehicle, or for the actions of any person who takes or removes the vehicle before the registered tow truck operator arrives.

(2)(a) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(e) and the driver is a registered owner of the vehicle, the impounded vehicle may not be redeemed within a 12-hour period following the time the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log, unless there are two or more registered owners of the vehicle or there is a legal owner of the vehicle that is not the driver of the vehicle. A registered owner who is not the driver of the vehicle or a legal owner who is not the driver of the vehicle may redeem the impounded vehicle after it arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(b) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(e) and the driver is a registered owner of the vehicle, the police officer directing the impound shall notify the driver that the impounded vehicle may not be redeemed within a 12-hour period following the time the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log, unless there are two or more registered owners or there is a legal owner who is not the driver of the vehicle. The police officer directing the impound shall notify the driver that the impounded vehicle may be redeemed by either a registered owner or legal owner, who is not the driver of the vehicle, after the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(c) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(l), the driver is arrested for racing, and the driver is a registered owner of the vehicle, the impounded vehicle may not be redeemed for a period of 72 hours from the time the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log, unless there are two or more registered owners of the vehicle or there is a legal owner of the vehicle that is not the driver of the vehicle. A registered owner who is not the driver of the vehicle or a legal owner who is not the driver of the vehicle may redeem the impounded vehicle after it arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(d) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(l), the driver is arrested for racing, and the driver is a registered owner of the vehicle, the police officer directing the impound shall notify the driver that the impounded vehicle may not be redeemed for 72 hours from the time the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log, unless there are two or more registered owners or there is a legal owner who is not the driver of the vehicle. The police officer directing the impound shall notify the driver that the

impounded vehicle may be redeemed by either a registered owner or legal owner, who is not the driver of the vehicle, after the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(3)(a) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(e) and the driver is not a registered owner of the vehicle, the impounded vehicle may be redeemed by a registered owner or legal owner, who is not the driver of the vehicle, after the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(b) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(e) and the driver is not a registered owner of the vehicle, the police officer directing the impound shall notify the driver that the impounded vehicle may be redeemed by a registered owner or legal owner, who is not the driver of the vehicle, after the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(c) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(l), the driver is arrested for racing, and the driver is not a registered owner of the vehicle, the impounded vehicle may be redeemed by a registered owner or legal owner, who is not the driver of the vehicle, after the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(d) When a vehicle is impounded under RCW 46.55.113(2)(l), the driver is arrested for racing, and the driver is not a registered owner of the vehicle, the police officer directing the impound shall notify the driver that the impounded vehicle may be redeemed by a registered owner or legal owner, who is not the driver of the vehicle, after the impounded vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility as noted in the registered tow truck operator's master log.

(e) If the vehicle is a commercial vehicle or farm transport vehicle and the driver of the vehicle is not the owner of the vehicle, prior to determining that no reasonable alternatives to impound exist and directing impoundment of the vehicle under RCW 46.55.113(2) (e) or (l), the police officer must have attempted in a reasonable and timely manner to contact the owner, and release the vehicle to the owner if the owner was reasonably available, not under the influence of alcohol or any drug, and not a party to the racing conduct that subjects the vehicle to impound.

(f) The registered tow truck operator shall notify the agency that ordered that the vehicle be impounded when the vehicle arrives at the registered tow truck operator's storage facility and has been entered into the master log starting any mandatory hold period provided for in this section.

(4) A registered tow truck operator that releases an impounded vehicle pursuant to the requirements stated in this section is not liable for injuries or damages sustained by the operator of the vehicle or sustained by third parties that may result from the vehicle driver's intoxicated state or illegal conduct relating to racing.

(5) For purposes of this section "farm transport vehicle" means a motor vehicle owned by a farmer and that is being actively used in the transportation of the farmer's or another farmer's farm, orchard, aquatic farm, or dairy products, including livestock and plant or animal wastes, from point of production to market or disposal, or supplies or commodities to be used on the farm, orchard, aquatic farm,

or dairy, and that has a gross vehicle weight rating of 7,258 kilograms (16,001 pounds) or more. [2023 c 283 s 7; 2020 c 117 s 3; 2011 c 167 s 3.]

Reviser's note: As to the constitutionality of this section, see *State v. Villela*, No. 96183-2 (October 17, 2019).

Effective date—2023 c 283: See note following RCW 46.04.367.

Finding—Intent—2020 c 117: See note following RCW 46.55.113.

Short title—2011 c 167: "This act shall be known and cited as Hailey's Law." [2011 c 167 s 1.]

RCW 46.55.370 Law enforcement liability immunity—Reasonable suspicion. If an impoundment arising from an alleged violation of RCW 46.61.502 or 46.61.504, or illegal racing under RCW 46.61.500 or 46.61.530, or a comparable ordinance is determined to be in violation of this chapter, then the police officer directing the impoundment and the government employing the officer are not liable for damages for loss of use of the vehicle if the officer had reasonable suspicion to believe that the driver of the vehicle was driving the vehicle in violation of RCW 46.61.502 or 46.61.504, or conducting illegal racing in violation of RCW 46.61.500 or 46.61.530, or comparable municipal ordinance. [2023 c 283 s 8; 2011 c 167 s 4.]

Effective date—2023 c 283: See note following RCW 46.04.367.

Short title—2011 c 167: See note following RCW 46.55.360.

ABANDONED RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

RCW 46.55.400 Transporting abandoned recreational vehicles—Record of delivery—Report—Liability. (1) A registered tow truck operator may transport an abandoned recreational vehicle under RCW 46.53.010 without being licensed as a hulk hauler. The transport of an abandoned recreational vehicle by a registered tow truck operator under this chapter must be completed by utilizing a reasonable, direct, and safe route on the date of transport.

(2) A registered tow truck operator must provide a written record of the delivery to a licensed dismantler or authorized disposal site for each abandoned recreational vehicle by use of an abandoned vehicle report or junk vehicle affidavit to be sent to the department. A copy of the report must be maintained in the vehicle transaction file. Completion of the report relieves the registered tow truck operator from any civil or criminal liability for the disposal of a properly processed abandoned recreational vehicle. [2018 c 287 s 2.]

Findings—2018 c 287: "The legislature finds that:

(1) Registered tow truck operators have continuing problems involving the disposal of recreational vehicles that have been impounded and abandoned pursuant to chapter 46.55 RCW;

(2) Traditional methods of disposal are no longer adequate to meet the increasing problem of abandoned recreational vehicles in Washington state;

(3) Abandoned recreational vehicles continue to be a hazard to the health and safety of citizens, business owners, and the environment; and

(4) Adequate funding is necessary to resolve the problem of abandoned recreational vehicles in a manner that is environmentally friendly and economically sound so that registered tow truck operators may be successful in their duties of public impounding, transporting, and storing unauthorized vehicles." [2018 c 287 s 1.]

Implementation—2018 c 287: "The director of licensing may take necessary steps to ensure that this act is implemented on its effective date." [2018 c 287 s 10.]

Effective date—2018 c 287: "This act takes effect May 1, 2019." [2018 c 287 s 12.]

MISCELLANEOUS

RCW 46.55.700 Program to compensate registered tow truck operators—Private property impounds, impounds performed under law enforcement direction—Form—Disbursement of excess funds—Annual report—Lien, deficiency claim—Notice.

(1) The department shall create a program to compensate registered tow truck operators for private property impounds or impounds performed at the direction of law enforcement to apply when the owner of the vehicle is indigent, except when the vehicle has been impounded after the vehicle owner has been arrested by a law enforcement officer.

(2) An individual seeking the release of a vehicle under this program must:

(a) Be the legal or registered owner of the vehicle;

(b) Be indigent;

(c) Either not have the ability to pay for the towing service or when making such payment would be a severe hardship;

(d) Not have applied for the release of a vehicle under this program more than once in the preceding year; and

(e) Fill out and certify the first part of the form described in subsection (4)(a) of this section and submit it to the registered tow truck operator.

(3) A registered tow truck operator may seek payment for private property impounds or impounds ordered by a law enforcement agency when the impound was not ordered following an arrest, for vehicles owned by individuals meeting the requirements of subsection (2) of this section. The registered tow truck operator applying for payment must fill out the second part of the form described in subsection (4)(b) of this section and must submit the completed form to the department.

(4) The department shall provide a form to registered tow truck operators that consists of two parts.

(a) The first part of the form is to be completed by individuals seeking the release of a vehicle and must include a requirement that individuals self-certify under penalty of perjury that they meet the

requirements of the program and acknowledge that they understand that the department may verify or audit the information and that perjury is a criminal offense.

(b)(i) The second part of the form is to be completed by registered tow truck operators and must include a requirement that registered tow truck operators self-certify under penalty of perjury that they have verified that:

(A) The impound was a private property impound or ordered by a law enforcement agency;

(B) The impound was not ordered following an arrest;

(C) The individual seeking the release of a vehicle is the owner of the vehicle registered or titled with the department; and

(ii) The registered tow truck operators must acknowledge that they understand that the department may verify or audit the information and that perjury is a criminal offense.

(5)(a) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall disburse excess funds deposited under RCW 46.55.130(2)(h) that are no longer subject to payment for a valid claim under RCW 46.55.130(2)(h) in an amount equal to the cost of the towing, storage, or other services incurred by the registered tow truck operators during the course of the private property impound or law enforcement directed impound to the eligible registered tow truck operators following submission of the form by the registered tow truck operator. Eligibility for payment under this section does not constitute an entitlement for payment. If eligible applications for payment exceed the funds available, the department must create and maintain a waitlist in the order the forms are received pursuant to this section. The department is not civilly or criminally liable and no penalty or cause of action may be brought against it regarding the provision or lack of provision of funds.

(b) After consulting with appropriate stakeholders, the department must develop rules establishing maximum rates of reimbursement for towing, storage, and other services, under this subsection. The department shall convene a stakeholder work group every two years, with the first meeting to be held within 12 months of rule adoption, to make recommendations on amendments to these rules.

(6) The department shall provide an annual report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by October 1st of each year. The annual report must include the total number of law enforcement directed tows not following an arrest, the number of vehicles released under this program, the number of applicants who received payment under this program, the total funds provided to applicants, the number of applicants on the waitlist who did not receive grants, the total amount of grants unpaid due to lack of funds, and the number of ineligible applicants and the reasons for ineligibility.

(7) A registered tow truck operator who releases the vehicle under this section does not have a lien or deficiency claim on the released vehicle.

(8) When an impounding tow truck operator sends notification to the legal and registered owners of a vehicle regarding the impoundment of it as required under RCW 46.55.110 and the vehicle may be eligible under this program, the impounding tow truck operator must include information in the notification about the program established in this section for the release of vehicles to indigent persons.

(9) The registered tow truck operator shall provide to each person who seeks to redeem an impounded vehicle that may be eligible under this program written notice, in a form and manner specified by

the department, of the release of vehicles to indigent individuals. The notice must be accompanied by the form described in subsection (4) of this section. [2025 c 417 s 1307.]

Reviser's note: The effective date in section 601 was changed from February 1, 2026, to July 1, 2027, by 2026 c 255. 2026 c 255 s 601 took effect March 31, 2026.

Effective date—2026 c 255; 2025 c 417 ss 1307-1309: "Sections 1307 through 1309 of this act take effect July 1, 2027." [2026 c 255 s 601; 2025 c 417 s 1406.]

Findings—Intent—2025 c 417: See note following RCW 82.38.030.

RCW 46.55.901 Headings not part of law—1985 c 377. Headings and captions used in this act are not any part of the law. [1985 c 377 s 27.]

RCW 46.55.902 Effective date—1985 c 377. This act shall take effect on January 1, 1986. [1985 c 377 s 31.]

RCW 46.55.910 Chapter not applicable to certain activities of department of transportation. This chapter does not apply to the state department of transportation to the extent that it may remove vehicles that are traffic hazards from bridges and the mountain passes without prior authorization. If such a vehicle is removed, the department shall immediately notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency, and the vehicle shall be processed in accordance with RCW 46.55.110. [1989 c 111 s 18.]