
SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE

VEHICLE RECOVERY SCHEME

The police have the legal power to remove vehicles in the following circumstances:-

- if the vehicle is illegally parked
- if the vehicle is causing a danger or obstruction
- if the vehicle is apparently abandoned
- stolen and found abandoned
- the vehicle is believed to contain evidence relating to an offence
- Vehicles involved in Road Traffic Collisions (RTC)
- Vehicles seized under Sections 165A & B, Road Traffic Act 1988
- Vehicles seized under Sections 59 and 60 of the Police Reform Act 2002

Why are the police now automatically removing stolen vehicles?

When cars are stolen or broken into, the offenders, very often set fire to the vehicles. It costs the Fire Service between £450 and £550 to send just one fire tender to the scene of a car fire and once committed to such an incident, it cannot be diverted. Therefore, other members of the public who are in greater, perhaps life-threatening need of the Fire Service will be deprived of them until they have extinguished the fire.

A car fire is usually deliberate and is arson, which is a serious criminal offence. The resultant burnt-out remains of these vehicles are a danger to the public, both immediately and in the future.

Why won't the police allow me to use my own stolen vehicle recovery?

There are two main reasons:-

Response times

When a police officer or police community support officer finds a stolen vehicle they will normally try to stay with it until it is recovered. However, they often have other incidents to attend to that require their immediate attendance such as public order situations or crashes. If they leave the vehicle, there is a distinct possibility that it will be restolen, vandalised or set on fire, creating additional costs to the police, the fire service, the loser and through insurance companies, to the rest of the citizens of South Yorkshire. The response times of owners and other recovery companies to stolen vehicles are often very slow, usually at least an hour, often several days or even months. Owners will often tell us that they can respond immediately, but when we do try to contact them, often in the middle of the night, they do not answer their phones, or if they do, they still do not attend promptly for a number of reasons. Even if they do, they rarely have the proper equipment or expertise to safely remove the vehicle and as a result leave it in situ, only to return later to find it restolen, vandalised or burnt out.

Police contractors are contractually required to be on the scene within a maximum of 30 minutes of a call from the police. The breakdown recovery clubs such as AA, Green Flag and the RAC are currently unable to guarantee this.

Public Safety

Car thieves usually drive stolen cars very dangerously, with little thought for the damage they are doing to the vehicle. Damage to certain parts of the vehicle can be clearly obvious, but other damage, especially to wheels, tyres, suspension and steering needs to be expertly examined before the vehicle is driven again. Also when the vehicle is being recovered by a normal tow, there is a possibility that the steering lock pin etc. will fail and the vehicle go out of control and kill or injure someone else, or damage someone else's property.

South Yorkshire Police authorised vehicle contractors carry a high level of equipment and only recover stolen vehicles by a suspended tow or full lift to neutralise these dangers and to protect the public.

How much will it cost to have my vehicle recovered?

The government sets the statutory recovery fee and the current charges are scenario based starting at £150 for the cheapest scenario (vehicle on road, upright and not substantially damaged, or any two wheeled vehicle) rising to £6000 for the most expensive (vehicle exceeding 18 tonnes MAM off road, either not upright or substantially damaged or both). This includes storage until midday, the following day. If you fail to collect your vehicle there will be further charges for each period of 24 hours or part thereof, based on the size of the vehicle with the cheapest (two wheeled vehicle) being £10, vehicles under 3.5 tonnes being £20 rising to a maximum of £35 for a vehicle exceeding 18 tonnes MAM

Who is responsible for informing me that my vehicle has been recovered?

A member of SYP will try to contact you, but in the event that this is impractical or impossible at the time of recovery, then the vehicle recovery operator is responsible for contacting you. The speed in which they try to contact you is dependent on whether your vehicle was recovered as a stolen vehicle or recovered for other reasons. The difference in time-scales is because of legal restrictions associated with the [Data Protection Act](#)

If your vehicle is recovered as stolen, the recovery operator will attempt to contact you, by telephone, within 24 hours of recovery. If they are unable to do so, they will send you a letter informing you that it has been recovered. If your vehicle is recovered for other reasons and you do not reclaim your vehicle within 24 hours of it being recovered, the recovery operator will send a letter to the last known keeper of the vehicle advising them that it has been recovered and outlining the recovery and storage charges.

What happens if I don't contact the recovery operator?

If there is no contact from the owner or the last known keeper within seven days of recovery, the police will normally authorise the recovery operator to dispose of the vehicle. This can be by sale or by scrapping it. A full audit trail for each vehicle recovered is maintained throughout its stay at the recovery operator, from recovery to ultimate disposal.

I don't want my vehicle back, do I have to pay for its recovery?

If you verbally asked for your vehicle to be removed, this is a contract, and is enforceable in law. You are obligated to pay the recovery fee, but South Yorkshire Police will ensure that these charges are reasonable.

If you did not ask for your vehicle to be recovered or can show that you were not the person responsible for abandonment then you can disclaim it. If you do, then you may not have to pay for its removal. However, when you disclaim your vehicle, you also disclaim its load which includes any items you had in it, on it, or attached to it. The only items that you can always have back, without payment, are the "essentials of life".

- * any medicines and medical equipment
- * financial items such as cash, credit cards, cheque books, pension or benefit books
- * keys, such as house or shop keys
- * immediately required outer clothing such as a raincoat or jumper

It does not include items such as fur coats, laptop computers or high value car stereo equipment.

Do I have to pay for my vehicle to be recovered if it is required as evidence?

Sometimes

If your vehicle is being recovered solely as evidence then you will not have to pay for its recovery or storage. However, if your vehicle is required to be removed from the public highway because it is illegally parked, apparently abandoned or causing an obstruction and also required as evidence, then you will have to pay for the recovery but not the storage. Storage charges will, however, start if you fail to collect your vehicle within 24 hours of it being released by the police.

I have had my vehicle seized. How do I claim it back.

If your vehicle was seized as the driver was uninsured, unlicensed or was driving the vehicle in an antisocial manner at the time of seizure, the officer will have given you a seizure notice detailing the requirements of the relevant legislation. This notice should be taken to a police station, together with all the relevant documents within 7 working days of seizure and the vehicle should be claimed back within 14 working days. Recovery and Storage charges are payable.

My insurance company will not pay the recovery cost because I only have third party insurance.

This is true and why it is extremely important that you take preventive measures to protect your vehicle by fitting security devices such as an immobiliser and/or a steering wheel lock. They are much cheaper in the long run than paying for recovery and repair costs, or the costs and inconvenience of replacing the vehicle. You should also be aware that you could lose far more than the vehicle if it gets stolen. Check your vehicle now. Often it contains items that are irreplaceable such as:

- computer data
- college and university course work
- photographs of family and friends
- business documents
- work tools
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The loss of these items can destroy whole businesses and lives and families - protect yourself.

Who do I complain to if I disagree with the removal of my vehicle and the recovery charge?

You should write to:

Vehicle Recovery Liaison Officer
Supply Chain Management
South Yorkshire Police
Hayes House
Kenyon Street
Sheffield
S1 4BD
Telephone 0114 2963863 (direct - office hours only)

Only in the most exceptional of circumstances will the police authorise the release of a removed vehicle without payment of the statutory removal fee.

The correct procedure is to pay your recovery fee and write in to the Vehicle Recovery Liaison Officer (VRLO), detailing your complaint with all the facts. They will independently investigate the incident and reply directly back to you as soon as their enquiries are complete. If the VRLO considers the police to be at fault, an immediate refund will be authorised together with an appropriate apology. If South Yorkshire Police is considered to have acted correctly, the VRLO will explain the reasons for that decision.

The VRLO cannot investigate any complaint if there are prosecutions pending, i.e., the vehicle was removed because it was illegally parked and a fixed penalty was issued. In such circumstances, the complainant will have to either pay the fixed penalty or complete the court proceedings first. Only then, can the VRLO commence an investigation.