

CHAPTER 23.1-15 ABANDONED MOTOR VEHICLES

23.1-15-01. Definitions.

For purposes of this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. "Abandoned motor vehicle" means a motor vehicle, as defined in section 39-01-01, that has remained for a period of more than forty-eight hours on public property illegally or lacking vital component parts, or is located on private property without consent of the person in control of the property or in an inoperable condition such that it has no substantial potential further use consistent with its usual functions, unless it is kept in an enclosed garage or storage building. It also means a motor vehicle voluntarily surrendered by its owner to a person duly licensed under section 23.1-15-09. An antique automobile, as defined in section 39-04-10.4, and other motor vehicles to include parts car and special interest vehicles, may not be considered an abandoned motor vehicle within the meaning of this chapter.
2. "Collector" means the owner of one or more special interest vehicles that collects, purchases, acquires, trades, or disposes of special interest vehicles or parts of special interest vehicles for the person's own use in order to restore, preserve, and maintain a special interest vehicle or antique vehicle.
3. "Commercial towing service" means a registered business in North Dakota that tows motor vehicles.
4. "Department" means the department of environmental quality.
5. "Emergency towing" means the towing of a vehicle due to a motor vehicle accident, mechanical breakdown on public roadway, or other emergency-related incident necessitating vehicle removal for public safety with or without the owner's consent.
6. "Parts car" means a motor vehicle generally in nonoperable condition which is owned by the collector to furnish parts to restore, preserve, and maintain a special interest vehicle or antique vehicle.
7. "Special interest vehicle" means a motor vehicle that is at least twenty years old and has not been altered or modified from original manufacturer's specifications and, because of its historic interest, is being preserved by hobbyists.
8. "Unit of government" includes a state department or agency, a county, city, township, or other political subdivision.
9. "Vital component parts" means those parts of a motor vehicle that are essential to the mechanical functioning of the vehicle, including, but not limited to, the motor, drive train, and wheels.

23.1-15-02. Penalty for abandoning a motor vehicle.

Any person that abandons a motor vehicle on any public or private property, without the consent of the person in control of the property, is guilty of a class A misdemeanor.

23.1-15-03. Custody of abandoned vehicle.

Units of government may take into custody and impound an abandoned motor vehicle. If requested by an owner, lessee, tenant, or occupant of private property, a commercial towing service may remove and take into custody an abandoned motor vehicle located on the private property.

23.1-15-04. Conditions under which an abandoned vehicle may be sold immediately.

When an abandoned motor vehicle is more than seven model years of age, is lacking vital component parts, and does not display a license plate currently valid in North Dakota or any other state or foreign country, it is immediately eligible for disposition and must be disposed of to a scrap iron processor licensed under section 23.1-15-09, and is not subject to the notification, reclamation, or title provisions of this chapter. Any license plate displayed on an abandoned vehicle must be removed and destroyed prior to the purchaser taking possession of the vehicle.

23.1-15-05. Notice to owner and law enforcement of abandoned vehicle.

1. When an abandoned motor vehicle does not fall within the provisions of section 23.1-15-04, the unit of government or commercial towing service taking it into custody shall give notice of the taking within ten days. The notice must set forth the date and place of the taking, the year, make, model, and serial number of the abandoned motor vehicle, and the place where the vehicle is being held, must inform the owner and any lienholders or secured parties of their right to reclaim the vehicle under section 23.1-15-06, and must state that failure of the owner or lienholders or secured parties to exercise their right to reclaim the vehicle is deemed a waiver by them of all right, title, and interest in the vehicle and a consent to the disposal of the vehicle pursuant to section 23.1-15-07.
2. The notice must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the registered owner, if any, of the abandoned motor vehicle and to all readily identifiable lienholders or secured parties of record. If it is impossible to determine with reasonable certainty the identity and address of the registered owner and all lienholders, the notice must be published once in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the motor vehicle was abandoned. Published notices may be grouped together for convenience and economy.
3. Subject to section 23.1-15-04, a commercial towing service that takes an abandoned motor vehicle into custody shall provide notice to the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction in the location from which the motor vehicle was towed within twelve hours after completing the tow.
4. Notice under subsection 3 must include:
 - a. The license plate number and state of registration;
 - b. The location from which the motor vehicle was towed;
 - c. The location to which the motor vehicle was towed;
 - d. The name, address, and telephone number of the commercial towing service that towed and is storing the motor vehicle; and
 - e. A description of the motor vehicle, including make, model, year, and color.
5. A commercial towing service that violates subsection 3 may not collect a storage fee under section 23.1-15-06 and shall return the motor vehicle to the registered owner at no cost to the owner.

23.1-15-06. Right of owner to reclaim abandoned vehicle.

1. The owner, secured parties, or a lienholder of an abandoned motor vehicle has a right to reclaim such vehicle from the unit of government taking the motor vehicle into custody upon payment of all towing and storage charges resulting from taking the vehicle into custody within thirty days after the date of the notice required by section 23.1-15-05.
2. The owner, secured parties, or a lienholder of an abandoned motor vehicle, within thirty days after receipt of the notice required by section 23.1-15-05, has a right to reclaim the vehicle from a commercial towing service taking the motor vehicle into custody upon payment of all towing and storage charges resulting from taking the vehicle into custody.
3. Storage charges under subsection 2 may not exceed fifty dollars per day for an abandoned passenger vehicle, pickup, van, or truck that does not exceed twenty thousand registered gross weight pounds [9071.85 kilograms].
4. Nothing in this chapter may be construed to impair any lien of a garagekeeper under the laws of this state or the right of a lienholder or secured parties to foreclose. For the purposes of this section, "garagekeeper" is an operator of a parking place or establishment, an operator of a motor vehicle storage facility, or an operator of an establishment for the servicing, repair, or maintenance of motor vehicles.
5. This section also applies to emergency towing.

23.1-15-07. Disposal of vehicle - Disposition of proceeds.

1. An abandoned motor vehicle not more than seven model years of age taken into custody by a unit of government and not reclaimed under section 23.1-15-06 must be sold to the highest bidder at public auction or sale, following reasonable published notice. The purchaser must be given a receipt in a form prescribed by the department which is sufficient title to dispose of the vehicle. The receipt also entitles the purchaser to register the vehicle and receive a certificate of title, free and clear of all liens and claims of ownership. The license plates displayed on an abandoned vehicle must be removed and destroyed prior to the purchaser taking possession of the vehicle.
2. If a commercial towing service takes custody of an abandoned motor vehicle and the vehicle is not reclaimed under section 23.1-15-06, the commercial towing service may obtain a release from the department of transportation which is sufficient title to dispose of the vehicle. The release entitles the commercial towing service to register the vehicle and receive a certificate of title, free and clear of all liens and claims of ownership. The license plates displayed on the abandoned vehicle must be removed and destroyed upon receipt of the new title.
3. From the proceeds of the sale of an abandoned motor vehicle, the unit of government or the commercial towing service may reimburse itself for the cost of towing, preserving, and storing the vehicle, and for all notice and publication costs incurred under this chapter. Any remainder from the proceeds of a sale must be held for the owner of the vehicle or entitled lienholder or secured parties for ninety days and then must be delivered to the administrator of the state abandoned property office in accordance with chapter 47-30.1.

23.1-15-08. Disposal of vehicles not sold.

When no bid has been received for an abandoned motor vehicle, the unit of government may dispose of it pursuant to contract under section 23.1-15-09.

23.1-15-09. Contracts for disposal - Issuance of licenses by department of environmental quality - Reimbursement of units of government for costs.

1. A unit of government may contract with any qualified licensed scrap iron processor for collection, storage, incineration, volume reduction, transportation, or other services necessary to prepare abandoned motor vehicles and other scrap metal for recycling or other methods of disposal. The contract may authorize the contracting scrap iron processor to pay to the owner of any abandoned motor vehicle an incentive payment for vehicle if it is voluntarily surrendered and delivered to the scrap iron processor. For purposes of this section, an owner of an abandoned motor vehicle includes only a person that has owned and operated the vehicle for the person's personal or business use.
2. The department may issue a license to any qualified scrap iron processor desiring to participate in a contract under this section that meets the requirements for solid waste disposers established by the department.
3. When a unit of government enters a contract with a scrap iron processor duly licensed by the department, the department may review the contract to determine whether it conforms to the department's plan for solid waste disposal. A contract that does conform may be approved by the department. When a contract has been approved, the department may reimburse the unit of government for the costs incurred under the contract, including incentive payments authorized and made under the contract, subject to the limitations of legislative appropriations.
4. The department may demand that a unit of government contract for the disposal of abandoned motor vehicles and other scrap metal under the department's plan for solid waste disposal. When the unit of government fails to contract within one hundred eighty days of the demand, the department, on behalf of the unit of government, may contract with any scrap iron processor duly licensed by the department for such disposal.

23.1-15-10. Abandoned motor vehicle disposal fund.

The abandoned motor vehicle disposal fund is established in the state treasury. All moneys derived from the investment of the fund are to be credited to the fund.

23.1-15-11. Tax on initial motor vehicle certificates of title.

A tax of one dollar and fifty cents is imposed on each initial North Dakota certificate of title issued to a passenger motor vehicle or a truck motor vehicle. The proceeds of the tax must be paid into the abandoned motor vehicle disposal fund. No registration plates or title certificate may be issued unless the tax is paid. Expenses of the fund arising under this chapter must be paid from the fund within the limits of legislative appropriation. If, on the first day of July in any year, the amount of uncommitted money in the abandoned motor vehicle disposal fund is two hundred fifty thousand dollars or more, the amount in excess of two hundred fifty thousand dollars must be transferred to the highway fund.

23.1-15-12. Storage of vehicles by collector - Limitations.

A collector may store unlicensed, operable or inoperable, vehicles and parts cars on the collector's property provided the vehicles and parts cars and the outdoor storage area are maintained so they do not constitute a health hazard and are screened from ordinary public view by means of a fence, trees, shrubbery, or other appropriate means.