



My car was towed. Can I get my things back?

Who can tow cars?

Your car can be towed by the city or by a private towing company. It can be towed from a city street or from private property.

When do they tow cars?

Your car can be towed and “impounded” for different reasons:

- If you park illegally, or somewhere for too long
- If you park on the wrong side of the street during a snow emergency
- if you have a lot of unpaid tickets
- if your car breaks down and you don’t move it for a while
- if you get into an accident on the highway

If this happens, you may be able to get your things out of your car even if you can’t pay to get your car right now.



What happens if they tow my car illegally?

You may have the right to sue the towing company for money and time you lost dealing with the tow. You can also sue for the fees you paid – but shouldn’t have – because the tow was illegal.

How do I find out where my car is?

Your car might be in a city or county lot, or it may be at a private impound lot that the tow company has a contract with. You can call city hall to ask where your car was taken.

If your car was towed from a private parking lot or business, there should be a sign posted with the name of the tow company and phone number.

You can try to find your car by calling local impound lots or checking their websites if they have one. There is no statewide number or website for this. You have to search in your city or county to find places to call or look up.

If your car was impounded or towed by a city or government agency, you should get a letter within 5 business days that says:

- When your car was towed and from where
- Information about your car, like the year, make, model and the serial number
- Where your car is

The letter should also explain:

- about your right to get your car back and what the charges are you have to pay
- what happens if you don't come get your car within a certain time
- how long you have to get your car
- how to get the things that are in your car

Try to get your car out of the impound lot as fast as you can! The amount you owe goes up every day the car is there!

Can I get my things out of my car?

If you have a low income, state law says the impound lot has to give you all your things that are in your car. This is only the things **IN** the car. It is not parts of the car like the spare tire, battery, radios, or DVD players attached to the car. Even if it is a DVD player or accessory that you added you won't be able to take it.



You have to ask and go to get your things out before the deadline listed in the letter. Call the lot as soon as you can! You might have as little as 15 days if your car was impounded in Minneapolis or St. Paul. You might have up to 45 days if your car was impounded somewhere else in Minnesota. You have to prove that you have a low income. (see below)

Can they charge me to get my things out of the car?

It depends on your income and if you get public assistance. If you are not low income and do not get public assistance they can charge and collect the whole towing fee and other fees owed before letting you get anything. BUT if you have a low income, you can get your things back for free. You need to prove to the impound lot that you are the car's owner and that you get or should get "relief based on need" (public assistance).

How do I prove that?

To prove that you get or should get "relief based on need," get a letter from the county, legal aid or another nonprofit agency. The letter needs to say that you are homeless, or on one of these programs:

- MFIP or DWP (Diversionary Work Program)
- medical assistance (MA) or MinnesotaCare
- general assistance (GA) or emergency general assistance (EGA)
- Minnesota supplemental aid (MSA)
- emergency assistance
- energy assistance
- SNAP benefits (food stamps)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

OR- you can also prove it if you get a letter saying you qualify for:

- earned income tax credit (EITC) or Minnesota working family tax credit
- legal aid services

Who can get things out of an impounded car?

Usually only the owner of the car can get property out of the car. Some impound lots will release the property to another person if they have a notarized letter from the owner saying it's okay. The owner still has to prove they get benefits, are homeless, or qualify for legal aid to get their things out of the car for free.

If you don't own the car, but have things in it, some places might let you get it out if you can prove it's yours. For example, if you have an ID and your name is on a bag or on a medication bottle.

What happens if they don't give me my things?

First, they have to give you a notice that tells you why they think you don't qualify to get your things back.

If you DO qualify, but they still won't return your things, you have the right to go to court. You ask a judge to order the tow company or impound lot to give you your things back. And, if the court gives that order, the tow company or impound lot also has to pay your lawyer fees.

If they won't give you your things back AND they get rid of your belongings, you have the right to go to court. If you win the tow company or impound lot has to pay you \$1,000 plus pay your lawyer fees.

Can I get my car out for free?

No. You have no right to get your car out for free no matter what your income is.



If your car was repossessed

If your car was repossessed, they can't keep the things that were in the car. You need to talk with the reposessor (the bank or lender) to find out how to get your things back.

Fact Sheets are legal information NOT legal advice. See a lawyer for advice.

Don't use this fact sheet if it is more than 1 year old. Ask us for updates, a fact sheet list, or alternate formats.

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