

Park where you should so the car won't vanish

By Tricia Waters

A student returns to the commuter parking lot to find that his car is gone. He instantly thinks that someone took it. Then he thinks of the backlog of parking tickets he received from UNL police over the last few months. Possibly the car was towed. The student stops at UNL police to check on his car's location.

Sgt. Mylo Bushing in the parking division of UNL police said many people are very upset when they come into the police station after their cars are towed. But once they learn the reason for towing, many of them calm down and accept the situation, he said.

Cars can be towed if they are parked illegally: on grass, a sidewalk, in a reserved stall, fire lane or other places. If the car owner owes at least \$20 in unpaid parking tickets or has three outstanding tickets, he can be towed, Bushing said.

To recover towed cars from Lincolnland Towing, 410 W. P St., the person must pay \$20. If it was towed for unpaid tickets, he must first stop at UNL police and pay the tickets before Lincolnland will release the car.

Bushing said police try to avoid towing a car for unpaid tickets by placing wheel locks on it. Those cost \$5 for police to remove, compared to the \$20 towing fee.

Towed 155 in November

Last month, Lincolnland towed 155 cars from campus for illegal parking or unpaid tickets. Lincolnland tows many cars during the football season, Bushing said.

Bushing said some people complain to UNL police that they weren't contacted before their cars were towed.

When a car is towed out of a residence hall parking lot, the UNL police will try to notify the owner by phone, leaving a message if he can't be reached, Bushing said. That way, the student who doesn't use his car often will be aware that it was removed from the lot and can get it back before Lincolnland storage fees accumulate, he said. The fees are about \$2 a day, he said.

Police can also trace an owner of a car towed from a staff lot by calling the

campus number the staff worker listed on his permit card, he said. But police can't trace the owner of a car parked in other areas on campus when it's towed because they have no way of knowing where the person would be, Bushing said.

"If there was an easy way to do it, we would," he said. Bushing said the officers don't have time to trace owners of cars.

Police don't notify

Lincoln police also don't notify car owners before their vehicles are towed because they don't have time to locate them, said Lt. Lyle Roberts.

He said police used to make every attempt to find the owner of a car blocking a driveway before it was towed. But that policy angered impatient people wanting to get out of or into their driveways, Roberts said. Sometimes the towing company would arrive at the same time as the car owner, and the tower wasted his time responding to the call, he said.

Drivers can have their cars towed for one Lincoln police parking ticket that has been unpaid for 15 working days and gone to warrant, Roberts said the municipal court sends several notices of unpaid tickets.

Attorney Shelley Stahl at Student Legal Services agreed that many students become frustrated after their cars are towed, especially when the towing company requires cash or a credit card payment.

Stahl has received a couple complaints from people whose cars were towed or had wheel locks placed on them. She said investigation of the complaints found that police had been acting within their regulations.

One question students should ask if they have a complaint is whether police followed their own regulations, she said.

A student could say that towing is taking someone's property without due process, an infringement on the Fifth Amendment, she said. But police say a person has plenty of notice for towing because of unpaid tickets when reminders are sent out, she said. Plus, people who buy parking stickers get a regulation booklet that includes the police's towing policy.

"A lot of people who get towed have a

slug of tickets and they know it's coming," Stahl said.

Charged with theft

Stahl said she warns people not to remove wheel locks from their cars and stow them somewhere. Then, police could charge them with theft of university property.

She said the best way to handle a towing complaint is to appeal to the Parking Advisory Committee, or possibly take it to civil court.

To keep from getting towed, Bushing

suggested that people pay attention to signs when they park and check with police to make sure they don't have outstanding tickets. Sometimes people take parking tickets off car windshields, and people won't know they had one until they get a notice. Reminders usually go out within five days.

Bushing said people can avoid towing by taking responsibility for their car's location.

"If they bring a car on campus they're responsible for that vehicle, and responsible for parking it right," Bushing said.

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