

Seattle Police Department Manual

15.190 – Auto Theft and Recovery

Effective Date: 01/01/2018

This policy applies to reporting auto thefts and recovering stolen vehicles.

15.190-POL

1. The Communications Section Updates Required Information onto CAD Calls When Processing an Auto Theft Report or Theft of License Plate Report

Calls include theft of a vehicle and theft of one or both license plates.

The Communications Section will update the CAD call with:

- The location of the theft
- The date and time range of the theft
- Whether any weapons were involved or known to be inside the vehicle
- The registered and legal owner of the vehicle
- The reporting party
- Impound authorization
- The complete vehicle entity
- The contact numbers for the registered owner of the vehicle
- Indication that tows, TOPS and Auto Records have been checked
- Indication of a vehicle tracking device
- Whether the vehicle was taken in connection with any other crimes

Exception: If any of the above information is not known at the time of the report, the Communications Section will note in CAD that it is unknown.

(See 15.190-PRO-1)

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2. Officers Remove the Remaining License Plate from the Victim Vehicle When One License Plate Reported Stolen

The officer will give the remaining license plate to the complainant for disposal.

Exception: If the officer is unable to remove the license plate, they may instruct the complainant to remove the license plate from the vehicle when feasible.

In the event that an officer stops a vehicle without a license plate, and the driver reports the license plate stolen, the officer or driver will remove the remaining license plate when feasible.

(See 15.190-TSK-2)

- The officer will allow the driver to drive from the scene without the license plates, when appropriate.

3. Officers Will Advise the Complainant to Follow Washington State Department of Licensing Guidelines for Disposal of Old License Plates

(See 15.190-TSK-2)

4. Officers Remove License Plate(s) from a Recovered Stolen Vehicle when License Plate Does Not Match the Vehicle

Officers will query the incorrect license plate and refer to 15.190-TSK-3.

Officers will advise the Communications Section:

- If the original license plates on the stolen vehicle are outstanding,
- The number of outstanding license plates, and
- If the outstanding license plate is a front or rear plate.

5. Officers Complete a Report Documenting the On-Scene Investigation of Stolen Vehicles and Plates

Officers will include in the narrative:

- The specific details of the theft, and

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- Any evidence left at the scene, and
- That they provided the complainant with a case number and business card.

Officers document property of significant value left in the vehicle by the victim on a property report.

(See 15.190-PRO-1)

6. Officers Document all Crimes in an Auto Theft Investigation Using the Same Case Number

When conducting a vehicle theft investigation with another crime(s), officers will complete a Report to document the crime and the vehicle theft using the case number under which the theft was reported.

Exception: If another crime is investigated under a vehicle recovery, officers will complete a Report for the investigation of the crime and a supplemental report to recover the vehicle using the Report Number under which it was reported stolen.

7. Officers Screen Certain Cases with the General Investigations Unit

Officers will refer complainants to the General Investigations Unit rather than complete a Report when:

- The complainant knows who has the vehicle.
- The complainant's child (juvenile or adult) took the vehicle. This also applies to family members over whom the complainant assumes a parent/guardian role and family members living in the same household.
- If the situation warrants a missing person/runaway report, officers will list the vehicle information in the narrative of that report.
- A rental car company is the complainant. This includes short term usage companies such as Car2Go and ZipCar.

8. Officers May Consult the General Investigations Sergeant

The General Investigations sergeant can be reached at (206) 684-8940 or via the Chief Dispatcher after hours.

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9. Officers Write a "Suspicious Circumstance" Report if the Complainant Insists on Receiving a Report Number

Officers provide the Report Number of the report to the complainant on a business card, and the sergeant applies the Auto Theft label to the Report.

10. Officers Will Impound Recovered Vehicles Only in Certain Instances

If the Communications Section cannot contact the owner or the owner cannot respond, officers will only impound recovered vehicles originally reported stolen in Seattle if:

- The owner authorized the impound,
- The vehicle poses an immediate hazard, or
- It is illegally parked as described in [SMC 11.30.040](#).

If none of the above applies, officers may leave the vehicle legally parked with a business card left in the vehicle.

Officers may also release the vehicle to another person specified by the owner.

11. Officers Will Complete a Supplement Report for Recovered SPD Stolen Vehicles

If a vehicle is originally reported stolen in Seattle and it is recovered in Seattle, officers will use the original Report Number for the recovery.

(See 15.190-PRO-2)

12. Officers Will Impound Vehicles Stolen Outside the City and Complete a New Report

Officers will immediately impound vehicles recovered in the city reported stolen outside the city. Officers will obtain a new Report Number for the Tow/Impound Record.

If a new crime is investigated with the recovery of an outside stolen, officers will use the same Report Number for the crime, recovery and impound.

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15.190-PRO-1 Taking a Report of Stolen Vehicle or Plates

Communications Section

1. **Documents** the required information on CAD call.
2. **Dispatches** officer to take the report.

Officer

3. **Interviews** complainant.
- 3a. If the case falls under 15.190-POL-6, refers complainant to the General Investigations Unit at (206) 684-8940 or SPDAutoTheft@seattle.gov.
 - If the complainant is referred to General Investigations or the investigation dictates that the vehicle should not be listed as stolen, notifies the Communications Section that the investigation is not a valid auto theft pending further investigation.

Or

- 3b. **Completes** the investigation (See 15.190-TSK-1 or 15.090-TSK-2).
- 3c. **Updates** required CAD information to the call if the Communications Section was unable to collect all of the required information prior to arrival.

Communications Section

4. **Forwards** the CAD call with information to the Data Center for processing.

Data Center

5. **Enters** the vehicle into WACIC/NCIC as stolen based on the information on the CAD call.

15.190-PRO-2 Recovering a Stolen Vehicle or Stolen License Plate(s)

Communications Section

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1. **Screens** incoming call to determine information needed for dispatch of an officer.
2. **Dispatches** officer to take the report.
3. Once the officer has located the vehicle, **verifies** the vehicle as stolen, and
4. **Relays** the verification to the responding officer.
5. **Contacts** the victim once directed by the officer.
6. **Advices** victim to respond to the scene to reclaim the vehicle.

Officer

7. **Locates** the vehicle.
8. **Completes** the investigation (See 15.190-TSK-3).

Communications Section

9. **Notifies** Data Center of the recovery details provided by the officer which include:
 - Location of the recovery
 - Recovering officer's call sign
 - Vehicle condition (damaged, stripped of wheels, plate, engine, transmission, other etc.)
 - Number of plates on vehicle (specify if rear plate missing)
 - Location of impound (if applicable)
 - Time owner was notified
 - Release to owner (if applicable)
 - Recovery CAD event number (if SPD stolen)
 - SPD Case number if outside agency stolen vehicle
 - Dispatcher serial and zone.

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10. **Calls** Data Center to advise that the hit was forwarded for processing.

11. **Updates** CAD event with notification that Data Center was notified.

15.190-TSK-1 Officer Documenting a Stolen Vehicle

After conducting a field investigation concerning the facts of the stolen vehicle report, the **officer**:

1. **Advise**s the complainant of impound options at time of recovery and that the vehicle may be impounded if:
 - A responsible party cannot respond
 - It presents a hazard
 - It is illegally parked, or
 - Recovered outside Seattle's jurisdiction
2. **Determines** if the reporting party would like their vehicle impounded or not and whether or not they consent to officers performing a vehicle search upon recovery.
3. **Advise**s Radio that the officer has a "verified stolen" and whether or not the complainant requests impound.
4. **Gives** a business card and case number to the complainant.
5. **Writes** a Report using the assigned case number on the call.

15.190-TSK-2 Officer Documenting a Stolen License Plate

After conducting a field investigation concerning the facts of the stolen license plate report, the **officer**:

1. **Removes** remaining license plate from the complainant's vehicle when feasible.
2. **Instructs** the complainant to comply with Washington State Department of Licensing guidelines for disposal of the removed license plate.
 - The complainant may:

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- Take the old license plate to their local vehicle licensing office, or
- Remove or invalidate the month and year tabs, bend the plate so that it cannot be used on a vehicle and recycle the license plate at a recycling center. or
- Remove or invalidate the month and year tabs and keep the license plate as long as they do not display the old license plates on a vehicle, or
- Mail old license plates to:

Department of Licensing
1125 Washington St SW
Olympia, WA 98504

3. **Advise**s Communications Section with the number of license plates stolen, if it was the front or rear license plate, disposition of the license plate(s) and any arrests made.
4. **Gives** a business card and case number to the complainant.
5. **Writes** a Report using the assigned case number on the call.

(See [Washington State Department of Licensing License Plate Disposal Guidelines](#))

15.190-TSK-3 Recovering a Vehicle or License Plate

The **officer**:

1. **Locates** the Vehicle.
2. **Verifies** that the vehicle or license plate is stolen with the Communications Section.
3. **Performs** an inventory search and fingerprint search of the vehicle.
4. **Notifies** the Communications Section of the number of license plates recovered, the condition of the vehicle and if any arrests were made.
- 5a. If only one license plate was recovered, **advise**s if it was the front or the back plate.
- 5b. If the vehicle is recovered bearing a license plate of another vehicle, the officer **removes** the license plate. The officer

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queries the plate to determine stolen status and **updates** the Communications Section.

- If the license plate returns stolen, the officer **places** the recovered plate(s) into SPD Evidence.
- If the license plate returns as not stolen, the officer **attempts to contact** the registered owner of the license plate, **enters** it into SPD evidence, and **documents** the license plate removal in a Report.

6a. If SPD stolen and owner can respond to retrieve vehicle, **releases** the vehicle to an authorized person.

6b. If SPD stolen and owner cannot respond to retrieve vehicle:

- **Impounds** the vehicle in a manner consistent with [6.120 Impounding Vehicles](#), or
- **Leaves** the vehicle parked with a business card attached.

6c. If outside agency stolen, **impounds** the vehicle.

7a. If the vehicle is an SPD Stolen, **completes** a supplemental report to the original Report Number to document the condition of the vehicle and circumstances of the recovery.

7b. If the vehicle is an outside agency stolen, **completes** a Report to document the condition of the vehicle and circumstances of the recovery.