GENERAL
A motor vehicle inventory is an administrative procedure designed to protect the owner’s property while it is in police custody, protect the officer against claims of loss or damage to impounded properties and protect the officer, the department and the public from any potential harm that may be posed by a vehicle or its contents.

PURPOSE
To establish procedures and guidelines for the inventory of motor vehicles which are in the possession of the Police Department for police purposes or safekeeping.

POLICY  CTLEA 1.1.8h
Whenever a motor vehicle is towed or impounded at the direction of a police officer, the officer must conduct an inventory of the contents, including items in all compartments and containers of the vehicle prior to its being removed unless the vehicle is to be processed for evidence or an inventory cannot be conducted safely at the scene. In those cases, the inventory may be performed at the tow company’s facility or by an evidence technician as the vehicle is processed. In any case, an officer must follow the tow truck to the facility to maintain custody of the vehicle.

DEFINITIONS

| Impounded Vehicles | Any vehicle lawfully taken into police custody. |

An inventory is NOT necessary when:

- The vehicle is disabled, the owner/operator is present and makes arrangements to have the vehicle removed by someone other than the Department’s tow contractor;
- The vehicle is towed by the Department’s tow contractor and the owner/operator accompanies the tow;
- The vehicle is not to be removed, does not impede the flow of traffic and is legally parked.
- When the owner and/or operator of the vehicle is present when the tow-truck arrives, the owner/operator has the responsibility to make arrangements for the protection of their property. A notation of the fact that the owner/operator was informed of their responsibility must be included in the officer’s report.

When the operator is arrested and proposes the vehicle be turned over to an identified person who is not under arrest or otherwise incapacitated, who is properly licensed to operate the vehicle and who agrees to take charge of the vehicle, the officer should allow such an arrangement as an alternative to police tow. In this instance, an inventory is not necessary.
PROCEDURES
An inventory shall be conducted in accordance with the procedures set forth in this directive, and shall be carried out with the required forms being filled out completely. Responsibility for filling out the forms rests with the officer assigned to the incident unless a superior officer directs otherwise. Delivery of the necessary copies is the responsibility of the assigned officer. To utilize this policy and implement it on a regular basis, the following procedure is adopted:

- The owner or operator of the vehicle, unless arrested or incapacitated, should be asked to remove all valuables from the vehicle prior to police tow. Items not removed shall be inventoried unless one of the conditions exists making an inventory unnecessary.
- An inventory shall be conducted for every vehicle an officer takes control of when the owner is unable to safeguard personal property within the vehicle.
- The vehicle will be inventoried regardless of the reason for the tow and regardless of the reason for the owner/operator not being present.
- Officers will document the inventory of the vehicle by filling in the section entitled “Comments/Additional Information” on Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles Form H-114, “Notice of Motor Vehicle Tow”. The officer will begin by writing “Inventory”, then will list the area of the vehicle and the items found in each area. Inventories may be continued on the back of the form.
- Inventory forms must be filled out entirely for each inventoried vehicle and signed by the officer and the tow company representative taking possession of the vehicle and its contents.
- Officers will visually inspect the front and rear seating areas of the vehicle and list on the inventory form any items observed and their location in the vehicle.
- Officers must make an examination of the exterior of the vehicle, noting on the form any visible damage or missing equipment, i.e. tires, hubcaps, etc.
- Examination of the interior should be complete to the extent access can be made without destructive forced entry.
- Whenever it appears the vehicle contains numerous items of personal property or items of high value or valuables may be in other parts of the vehicle such as the glove compartment or trunk area when the officer has the keys, and potential liability exposure for lost or mislaid items of personal property is high, the officer must notify his or her immediate supervisor. The supervisor will decide whether items of exceptional value should be removed from the vehicle and held for safekeeping.
- Containers, such as bags, boxes, canisters, etc., found during the inventory shall be opened and the contents listed and described in the inventory and thereafter returned to the container. Officers can use their discretion in deciding not to open a container when they feel the container does not need to be opened because of the nature of the container or its contents, for example, cartons of milk, cans of food, groceries, etc.
- If an officer finds a locked glove compartment, trunk, or container, (such as a strong box or luggage) and does not have a key to gain access to the contents, forced entry is not to be made without a search warrant. A notation must be made in the inventory form that access could not be made into this particular area.
• When there is a live animal in the vehicle, the officer must notify animal control to take charge of the animal unless the owner or operator of the vehicle makes other arrangements.

• When weapons, explosives or other hazardous materials are found, normal departmental procedures for the disposition of those items should be followed.

A motor vehicle inventory shall not be made for the purpose of searching for or gathering evidence. However, any items found as result of the inventory should be seized and used as a basis for a subsequent arrest if the circumstances warrant this action (i.e. weapons, contraband, instrumentalities or fruits of a crime.)

Items noted on the inventory shall remain with the vehicle after being signed for by the tow company representative and all inventory forms shall be turned in with the officer’s incident report.

All vehicles “seized” by police as evidence, for being used in the commission of a crime, will be inventoried regardless if the owner or operator is present unless the vehicle is to be processed for physical evidence.

PER ORDER OF

RONNELL A. HIGGINS
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CHIEF OF POLICE