



Problem-Oriented Guides for Police
Problem-Specific Guides Series
No. 53



Abandoned Vehicles

by
Michael G. Maxfield

www.cops.usdoj.gov



Center for
Problem-Oriented Policing

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Abandoned Vehicles

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About the Problem-Specific Guide Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of Problem-Solving Tools guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
 - **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.
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- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem. (A companion series of Response Guides has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)
 - **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
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- **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies including other government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective problem solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as “a policing philosophy that promotes and supports organizational strategies to address the causes and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and police-community partnerships.” These guides emphasize *problem-solving* and *police-community partnerships* in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem solving and police-community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs, and police practices vary from



country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice, and each guide is anonymously peer-reviewed by a line police officer, a police executive, and a researcher prior to publication. The review process is independently managed by the COPS Office, which solicits the reviews.

The COPS Office and the authors encourage you to provide feedback on this guide and to report on your own agency's experiences dealing with a similar problem. Your agency may have effectively addressed a problem using responses not considered in these guides and your experiences and knowledge could benefit others. This information will be used to update the guides. If you wish to provide feedback and share your experiences, send your comments by e-mail to cops_pubs@usdoj.gov

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at www.popcenter.org. This web site offers free online access to:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides series*
 - The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools series*
 - Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics
 - An interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise
 - An interactive *Problem Analysis Module*
 - A manual for crime analysts
 - Online access to important police research and practices
 - Information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs.
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Cynthia Pappas oversaw the project for the COPS Office and research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University by Phyllis Schultze. Suzanne Fregly edited this guide.



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The Problem of Abandoned Vehicles

What This Guide Does and Does Not Cover

This guide begins by describing the problem of abandoned vehicles and reviewing factors that increase its risks. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local abandoned-vehicle problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem, and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

Abandoned vehicles fall within larger sets of problems involving motor vehicle regulation, social disorder, and the illegal disposal of bulky, hazardous waste. Abandoned vehicles are often unregistered and may have defaced identification numbers. Abandoned vehicles attract vandals, may be used for drug drops or prostitution, accumulate refuse, and may be used as shelters by the homeless. Some motor vehicle parts contain hazardous substances, in addition to gasoline and other fluids, that must be properly disposed of. Old vans and truck trailers may be filled with trash or hazardous waste, then left on roadsides. Individual cars dumped on city streets may contain car parts or other junk.

This guide is limited to addressing the particular harms created by abandoned and other types of derelict vehicles. Related problems not directly addressed in this guide, each of which requires separate analysis, include the following:

- Drug dealing
 - Hazardous waste dumping
 - Homeless people
 - Illegal dumping
 - Illegal auto repair and sales
 - Insurance fraud
 - Littering
 - Junk vehicles intentionally kept on private property
 - Nuisance parking
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- Prostitution
- Scrap metal theft
- Unlicensed or unregistered vehicles generally
- Vehicle theft.

(Some of these related problems are covered in other guides in this series, all of which are listed at the end of this guide. For the most up-to-date listing of current and future guides, see www.popcenter.org.)

At the same time, it is useful to recognize that these and other problems may either contribute to or be side effects stemming from abandoned vehicles.

General Description of the Problem

The term "abandoned vehicle" is often applied loosely to different types of nuisance vehicles. The latter includes dilapidated cars that still bear license plates but appear unsafe, vehicles that emit noxious smoke, cars that are being repaired on public streets, and inoperable vehicles that are on private property. Drivers may temporarily abandon cars that break down on highways as they arrange for repairs. This is different from a junk car dumped and permanently abandoned.

The terms "derelict vehicles" or "junk cars" refer to inoperable cars and trucks intentionally kept on private property. The owner may keep a derelict vehicle for spare parts, or intend to repair it some day. Police responsibility for derelict vehicles can vary. In many jurisdictions, special code enforcement departments monitor and sanction junk cars and trucks owners keep on private property. Abandoned vehicles most commonly become police problems when left on public property, or on private property without an owner's consent.



There are no national estimates of the numbers of abandoned vehicles in the United States. In England, estimates range from about 200,000 to 300,000 annually for the years 2000 through 2004.¹ Among U.S. cities, Seattle police received about 4,200 reports each month in 2002,² the New York City Sanitation Department picked up over 9,200 vehicles in 2006,³ while Philadelphia police towed over 32,000 abandoned cars in a 40-day period in 2000.⁴ One year after Michigan implemented a statewide data system for tracking towed vehicles, over 92,000 abandoned vehicles were removed.⁵

It is difficult to produce reliable estimates, partly because of different approaches to counting. Cars reported and cars towed are common measures. But each of these is affected by concerted cleanup and publicity campaigns, together with changes in how people can report suspected vehicles. Changes in definitions or rules about when a vehicle can be assumed to be abandoned also play a role in counting. For example, the New York City Sanitation Department reports separate numbers for vehicles tagged as abandoned, and those actually collected.

The following factors are usually considered in classifying a vehicle as abandoned:

- Condition, appearance. Body damage, missing or flat tires, missing doors or other major parts, broken windshields or windows, garbage or other debris inside the vehicle, evidence of fire damage, signs of vandalism, trash accumulating around the vehicle.
 - Missing or outdated license plates and other documentation (inspection stickers, local registration decals).
 - Location (parked on public streets or other public property). Property owners or managers usually must report cars abandoned on private property without the owner's consent.
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- Length of time at location. This can vary from a very short period for highways or limited-access roads, to longer periods in parking facilities, to somewhere in between for street parking.
- Notification, nonresponse. Most jurisdictions require that stickers or some other warning be applied to cars or sent to registered owners before they can move a vehicle. If the owner does not respond within a specified time frame, the vehicle can be towed.

Abandoned vehicles are problems in a variety of areas, ranging from sparsely inhabited tribal lands, through rural areas, to large cities.⁶ Even within cities, people may dump cars around industrial wastelands (brownfields), in large parking lots, along train or highway buffer lands, in vacant lots, on city streets, in remote parks, or even in cemeteries.⁷ People abandon different types of vehicles for different reasons. Those discarded in less populated areas are usually older cars and trucks of little value. Abandoned vehicles in urban areas may also include stolen cars. Among these will be autos that are intact, partly stripped, or burned-out.

Some places have certain features that produce unusual types of problems. For example, people dump a lot of vehicles in Boston's Logan Airport parking garage.⁸ Because it is common for owners to leave cars at airports for extended periods, distinguishing abandoned cars from the thousands parked in large facilities can take weeks. Airport parking facilities may attract abandoned vehicles as people drive to the airport before moving to another region or country.⁹ The problem may be particularly acute in Boston, where students at the many colleges and universities in the area dump the old cars that served as city transportation.



Remote resort areas such as Key West (Florida) and Martha's Vineyard (Massachusetts) attract old cars that people use as short-distance island transportation. But the junkers eventually age beyond repair and are abandoned. The problem is compounded by the added cost of removing junk cars from remote locations. Key West and other low-lying islands in the Florida Keys are further burdened when hurricanes or tropical storms damage many cars.¹⁰

Interestingly, this variation is not restricted to expensive vacation sites. The related problem of "disposable transportation" has been identified in some depressed urban areas in the United States and England. People use older cars, usually unregistered, for short-distance transportation in urban neighborhoods. The cars eventually break down and are left where they fall. Termed "invisible cars" by England's Lancashire police, they may be informally shared as a type of communal transportation, and used in drug sales or other offenses.¹¹ Disposable cars have been cited as particular problems by police in Philadelphia¹² and Washington, D.C.¹³

Derelict or inoperable vehicles are also found on private property, with or without the property owner's consent. In the latter case, people may dump cars in parking lots or on vacant land. Complaints about junk cars on private property may be more common in formerly rural areas that attract development as cities expand.¹⁴ The sensibilities of outward-moving people clash with those of existing residents who view old cars as sources of cheap spare parts, not as junk.



As these examples suggest, abandoned vehicles are not always police problems. Depending on local ordinances, junk vehicles on private property may be treated as code violations. Similarly, dealing with vehicles abandoned in parking lots or on other private property may technically be the property owners' responsibility. It usually becomes a police problem when vehicles are abandoned or appear to be abandoned on streets or other public property.

Harms Caused by Abandoned Vehicles

Abandoned vehicles may be viewed as a quality-of-life problem; they are unsightly, and they symbolize and contribute to signs of disorder and decay. Wilson and Kelling¹⁵ argue that broken windows—either literal broken windows of vehicles and buildings or figurative “broken windows” of all sorts of physical and behavioral disorder—invite further disorder and crime. Years before that article was published, Philip Zimbardo¹⁶ described how damaged vehicles parked on city streets in New York and California attracted additional damage in the form of literal broken windows, other vandalism, and parts-stripping. In the same way, abandoned derelict vehicles can undermine the quality of life while potentially contributing to further problems:

- Attracting children
 - Containing gasoline and other dangerous fluids
 - Attracting further damage and parts-stripping
 - Becoming targets for arson
 - Being used by the homeless or street prostitutes
 - Being used for drug drops
 - Occupying scarce parking spaces in urban areas
 - Obstructing street-cleaning.
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Abandoned vehicles may be viewed as a quality of life issue because they are unsightly and contribute to signs of disorder and decay.

Additional problems accompany vehicles abandoned in rural areas, abandoned lots, or wastelands. Once a single car is dumped in a vacant lot or on an access road, it can attract other abandoned vehicles and illegal dumping, turning the area into a de facto junkyard.¹⁷ People often dump cars in remote wetlands in places like Florida, where they can contaminate water and obstruct storm drains.¹⁸ Removing junk vehicles from wetlands and other hard-to-reach locations can be more difficult than collecting them from city streets.

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Once a single car is dumped in a vacant lot it can attract other abandoned vehicles and illegal dumping.



Although cars have unique identifying numbers and must be registered with state and sometimes local agencies, keeping track of them and their owners can be difficult. This is especially true for older vehicles that may be sold and not registered by their new owner, intended for use as spare parts, not transportation. Older cars may be unregistered, while an owner plans to restore the vehicle to working order some day. If cars are subsequently abandoned, a search of the vehicle identification number (VIN) may produce information on the former owner. In a more general sense, vehicle registration and licensing systems have been identified as weak links in documenting car ownership.¹⁹ Most state agencies and systems were organized when the number of registered vehicles was much lower than it is today.

Dealing with a lot of abandoned vehicles can be costly and time-consuming. Once suspected cars are reported, they are usually tagged, and efforts are launched to identify the owner. Some time must elapse between when police can flag a vehicle as abandoned and when they can have it removed. Then the police store the vehicle for a time before its ultimate disposition, while efforts to identify a registered owner continue. If people have deposited garbage or hazardous waste in abandoned vehicles, there can be additional costs of safe removal of the debris before police can have a car impounded. Leaking fluids or vehicle arson can produce additional cleanup costs.



Factors Contributing to Abandoned Vehicles

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses. In general, two factors contribute to the problem: the cost of operating and disposing of vehicles, and the side effects of vehicle regulation and licensing procedures.

Cost of Operating and Disposing of Vehicles

Value of scrap metal. A steady decline in the value of scrap metal salvaged from junk cars and trucks was recognized as an important reason for increased abandoned vehicles in England²⁰ and Scotland.²¹ If scrap metal companies pay less for each junk vehicle, profits are reduced for towing and auto-salvage operations.²² This can increase the cost to those who seek to have a junk car towed away. It can also force auto salvage businesses to close, reducing the capacity to dispose of abandoned vehicles.

On the other hand, there is at least one anecdotal report of how increases in the value of scrap metal may have caused scavenging junk dealers to collect vehicles tagged as abandoned in New York.²³ It also appears that the value of scrap metal in the form of "auto bundles" (bulk crushed cars) has increased in global markets, more than doubling from 2001 to late 2007.²⁴ Higher prices seem to have been accompanied by growth in the number of U.S. businesses offering to tow junk cars for free. This offers opportunities



for responses to the problem (see below).

Cost and convenience of legitimate disposal. When Boston banned disposal of cathode ray televisions and computer monitors in city garbage collection, the illegal dumping of these items increased.²⁵ In a similar fashion, when the costs of legitimate disposal increase, people are more likely to abandon junk vehicles.

Less populated places such as tribal lands²⁶ or rural areas²⁷ often lack convenient access to scrap-vehicle operations. Or the distance to a scrap yard may add to the cost of having towing companies collect vehicles. Urban areas may have more ready access to scrap businesses, but people may opt to dump a car if they must pay for towing and legitimate disposal. Such incentives are stronger for low-income owners of low-value cars that are more likely to be scrapped.

Cost of repair and insurance. Owners may nurse older cars along for several years, but eventually the repair costs will exceed the vehicle's value. This applies to mechanical repairs and serious body damage. Owners of older cars less often buy collision or comprehensive insurance, and may opt to junk rather than repair a damaged vehicle.

Cost of safety and emissions compliance. Increasingly stringent auto safety and emissions standards add to the cost of legitimate operation. Such costs may be unanticipated results from required inspections, and beyond owners' ability to pay. The purpose for such standards is to require basic repairs that owners might not otherwise make. Financially strapped owners of older cars may abandon them as a result. The European Union is phasing in the End-of-Life Vehicle



Directive (ELVD), which sets standards on the disposal of end-of-life vehicles. It is generally believed that the ELVD will at least initially increase the number of vehicles illegally dumped.²⁸ An organization concerned with the quality of life in urban neighborhoods claims that abandoned vehicles increased in Boston following more stringent emission inspection standards in Massachusetts.²⁹

Low-quality and "orphaned" vehicles. Cars that are poorly built and mechanically unreliable quickly lose value in used-car markets. As a result, they may be more affordable to lower-income people who nonetheless require transportation. Such cars are more likely to break down and become increasingly costly to repair. So-called "orphaned cars" are those built for only a few years, often because they were poorly built and attracted few buyers. Low-quality cars orphaned by their manufacturers and in need of frequent repairs become cars that are more difficult to economically keep and more likely to be abandoned.

Natural disasters. The large number of cars Hurricane Katrina destroyed is well documented. Less well-known is that thousands of cars suffering water damage have found their way to markets with fraudulent titles.³⁰ These cars are certain to lead short, troubled lives and are probably at risk of being abandoned. More commonly, hurricanes and widespread floods seriously damage a lot of cars per event. Cleaning up these cars is often part of the recovery effort.



Side Effects of Vehicle Regulation and Licensing Procedures

Auto theft and insurance fraud. Cars reported as abandoned, or cars bearing damage that attracts the attention of neighborhood residents and police, have often been stolen. These may be classified as abandoned, or as recovered stolen vehicles. Newark (New Jersey) police reported that of more than 26,000 vehicles towed in 2006, 539 were classified as abandoned, compared with 4,996 recoveries of stolen cars.³¹ In either case, they are identified, towed, and processed through similar channels. Police speculate that a reduction in abandoned vehicles reported in New York is a side effect of reduction in car theft.³²

Insurance industry sources estimate that a substantial proportion of auto-theft claims are fraudulent.³³ Staged thefts are also known as "give-ups," because an owner arranges to have a car taken. The vehicle may then be dumped in a remote location, burned, or otherwise totally destroyed.

Auctions of low-value vehicles. Most jurisdictions store abandoned vehicles for some period of time before destroying those of little or no value, or arranging for them to be sold. The threshold for selling unclaimed cars was \$500 or more in Connecticut.³⁴ Typically, vehicles are sold at auction with low minimum bids and low selling prices, attracting buyers in search of low-cost transportation, or very low-end used-car dealers. In Washington, D.C., car auctions formerly required only a \$25 minimum bid.³⁵ Individuals or dealers may then resell these very cheap cars. Reports from Philadelphia,³⁶ Washington, and other cities describe how people use such cars as "disposable transportation"—operable for a few weeks, then discarded. Disposable cars may be unregistered and, as a result, may be tagged as abandoned.



Through this process, vehicles can be abandoned more than once. Old cars donated to charities may also be auctioned, adding to the number of junkers on city streets that people may later abandon.[§]

Registration and licensing procedures. Individual buyers and sellers of older cars may not complete title transfers or other registration requirements. One result might be that registration continues in the seller's name. Or a buyer may opt to not register the vehicle. As a result, no documentary trail exists, or records incorrectly list registration with a former owner. This makes it easier to eventually abandon an old vehicle, with little or no risk of being traced as an owner.

Long-term or unlimited parking in public facilities. People are more likely to abandon cars at locations that are not regularly monitored, or places where it is common for vehicles to be left for extended periods. A discarded car may remain for an extended time on a city street with unmetered, unlimited parking. Similarly, people routinely park cars at airport lots for several days or more. Parking lots serving large apartment complexes can also be places where an unmoved vehicle goes unnoticed for weeks or more. Identifying abandoned vehicles can be difficult in these settings, until debris accumulates on or around a car. People may also dump cars on unpaved roads or tracks near parks, or on transportation and utility corridors.

[§]The Baltimore Transportation Department web site, which describes the department's efforts to collect abandoned vehicles, includes lists of vehicles to be auctioned—more than 100 were scheduled for an auction to be held October 24, 2007.³⁷



Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of problems associated with abandoned vehicles. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

Stakeholders

In addition to criminal justice agencies, the following groups have an interest in the abandoned vehicle problem, and you should consider them for the contribution they might make to gathering information about the problem and responding to it:

<p>Local Government Agencies</p> <p>Sanitation, environmental protection, streets and transportation, parking enforcement, public works, code enforcement:</p> <p>Different local agencies have responsibility for regulating parking, cleaning streets, and abating environmental hazards. You should learn about routines and agency rules that may involve them in the problem of abandoned vehicles.</p>
<p>State-Level Agencies</p> <p>Vehicle registration, inspection, and licensing; state police; environmental protection:</p> <p>State agencies are sources of information about vehicle registration. Obtaining timely, accurate information about ownership is important. State environmental protection agencies may be sources of assistance in cleaning up large vehicle dump sites. Other state agencies may regulate auto repair shops, auction facilities, and scrap yards.</p>
<p>Federal Agencies</p> <p>Bureau of Land Management (BLM); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):</p> <p>The BLM has jurisdiction over large federal lands where people may dump vehicles. The federal EPA has developed programs for cleaning up dump sites on tribal lands.</p>



§ See the Problem-Solving Tools guide *Partnering With Businesses To Address Public Safety Problems* for further information on this class of stakeholders.

<p>Neighborhood Residents:</p> <p>People should know how to recognize and report suspected abandoned vehicles in their neighborhood.</p>
<p>Tribal Land and Village Leaders:</p> <p>The EPA publication <i>Tribal Waste Journal</i> offers examples of responses to waste disposal problems on tribal lands. Informal junk-vehicle dump sites are among the problems that have been addressed with the cooperation of tribal leaders.</p>
<p>Vacant Land or Brownfield Owners:</p> <p>Where private land becomes a site for dumped vehicles, property owners should be involved in developing responses to the problem. Owners may welcome cleanup campaigns and assistance in blocking access roads to vacant lots.[§]</p>
<p>Vehicle Towing and Storage Operators:</p> <p>Most jurisdictions contract with private towing and storage operators. Any efforts to revise procedures for collecting abandoned vehicles will require collaborating with these businesses.</p>
<p>Auto Scrap Yards:</p> <p>Scrap businesses are important resources for collecting or accepting abandoned vehicles of little value. Cleanup campaigns should be conducted in collaboration with scrap yards. Web-based information for disposing of junk cars should include listings of these businesses.</p>
<p>Junk-Car Collection Services:</p> <p>If available in your location, these services may be useful resources for collecting unwanted vehicles.</p>
<p>Vehicle Auction Facilities:</p> <p>Vehicle auctions are sources of older cars that may soon be abandoned, becoming a type of disposable transportation. Some jurisdictions have required that auction facilities set a higher minimum bid to reduce the number of low-value cars recycled to city streets.</p>
<p>Crushing-and Baling-Equipment Manufacturers and Dealers:</p> <p>Jurisdictions in less populated areas may regularly rent portable car crushers as part of an annual cleanup initiative.</p>
<p>Hazardous Waste Abatement Services:</p> <p>If junk vehicle dump sites are found in your jurisdiction, it may be necessary to engage hazardous waste disposal services. Such services may also be necessary if dumped vehicles contaminate waterways.</p>



Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your community's abandoned-vehicle problem, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

Locations/Times

- Are abandoned vehicles found in particular locations or types of locations? What percentage are located on public streets? On other public property, such as parks or transportation corridors? On private property?
- Are abandoned vehicles concentrated in particular dumping spots, or are they individually left on streets? Why do these sites attract vehicle dumping?
- For sites that attract multiple vehicles, how do people access them? Do sites adjoin public roads? Are sites posted? If barriers have been present, have they been removed or damaged?
- Are abandoned vehicles more common in some neighborhoods?
- Are vehicles abandoned at particular times? Or do they seem to accumulate over extended periods?

Incidents

- How many abandoned vehicles are reported or recorded? How many are collected?
 - Has there been any recent change in the scope or scale of the problem?
 - How are abandoned vehicles defined and detected? Citizen reports? On view by routine police patrol? By sanitation or street-sweeping crews?
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- What are the cars' condition? Are they operable or intact? Or do cars have damage or missing components?
- Why are vehicles dumped? Are they old, inoperable cars? Are vehicles operable but unable to pass safety or emissions inspections? How many dumped vehicles can be linked to theft or fraudulent theft reports? Are burned-out vehicles abandoned? Do thieves burn stolen cars?
- Are vehicles abandoned individually, or dumped in groups?
- Do abandoned vehicles move? Is there evidence that people are using junk cars for local and/or communal transportation?
- Do abandoned vehicles disappear after being tagged or reported? Does a prominent sticker alert gray-market scrap dealers that they may collect a car?
- Are abandoned vehicles contributing to other forms of social disorder? Are they used as drug drops? Do homeless people sleep in them? Do street prostitutes use them?

Environmental Hazards

- Do dump sites pose additional environmental problems, such as drainage obstruction or water contamination?
 - Do abandoned vehicles contain refuse, debris, or hazardous materials? Does it appear that cars are filled with additional waste before being dumped? Can any additional waste be traced to particular sources?
 - Does it appear that cars are stripped after being abandoned? What parts or components are taken? Or are parts removed before cars are dumped?
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Community Perceptions and Resources

- How concerned are community residents about the problem? Are concerns greater in some neighborhoods than in others?
- Do property owners complain about abandoned vehicles?
- Is information about reporting abandoned vehicles readily available to residents? What about disposing of unwanted vehicles?

Current Practice: Reporting

- What is the definition of an “abandoned vehicle”? How long must vehicles be unattended before they can be declared abandoned? Does the time vary by type of road or other location?
 - What local agencies are responsible for tagging vehicles as abandoned? Do police have discretion to declare vehicles as hazards and have them collected immediately?
 - Do vehicle registration and computer systems make it possible to trace vehicle registration and VIN’s quickly? Do people responsible for identifying abandoned vehicles have adequate access to data systems?
 - What proportion of abandoned vehicles is not linked to a registered owner? What proportion has no record in state vehicle-records systems?
 - How much notice must be posted on abandoned vehicles before they can be towed? What are the requirements for contacting vehicle owners?
 - What on-street parking regulations might affect the identification of abandoned vehicles? How often must vehicles be moved before they can be cited for parking violations? Are periodic on-street parking prohibitions routinely monitored?
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- How do residents report suspected abandoned vehicles? Are special telephone numbers or web-based forms available?
- Are property owners and managers required to post notice that vehicles parked without permission will be removed at the vehicle owner's expense? Can property owners have government agencies or contractors tow vehicles? Or must they be towed and disposed of at the property owner's expense?

Current Practice: Towing and Disposition

- What are the arrangements for towing and storing abandoned vehicles? Are public agencies or private contractors used? How long must vehicles be kept before they are disposed of?
 - Do auto auction facilities operate in your area? If so, how often are cars auctioned? Are auctions open to the public, or to registered dealers only? What minimum bids are required? What are documentary requirements?
 - How far is the nearest auto salvage yard that accepts junk vehicles? Will it collect junk cars from individuals? What fees, if any, does it charge?
 - Are owners required to pay for having derelict vehicles collected?
 - Do private vehicle-collection services operate in your area? If so, what are the terms of service? Is collection available only for owners who can produce a vehicle title?
 - What fines and other penalties are imposed for abandoning a vehicle on public property?
 - Are provisions for neighborhood cleanup campaigns supported in your jurisdiction? Could abandoned-vehicle initiatives be routed to existing cleanup efforts?
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Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. You should take all measures in both the target area and the surrounding area. For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the Problem-Solving Tools guide *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*.

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to abandoned vehicles:

- Fewer vehicles collected in cleanup initiatives
 - Fewer citizen reports of abandoned vehicles
 - Fewer vehicles tagged as abandoned
 - Fewer vehicles towed
 - Reduced time between initial report and collection,
 - Increase in junk vehicles disposed of through private collectors
 - Fewer abandoned vehicles sold at government auction
 - Increased proportion of vehicles disposed of as scrap
 - Reduction in vehicle arson
 - Reduced expenditures on towing and disposing of abandoned vehicles
 - Reduced citizen perceptions of abandoned vehicles as problems
 - Fewer abandoned vehicles observed at known dump sites
 - Reduced number of vehicles meeting abandoned-vehicle definition criteria observed on streets.
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§ For additional Information on conducting observational surveys, see Bureau Review of Justice Assistance (1993) and Maxfield (2001).

You can extract most of these measures from existing forms routinely used to collect information and document actions taken. The last two involve observational surveys that can take different forms. You can select and survey sample streets over some specific period. Or observation can supplement routine public services, such as street-cleaning or parking enforcement. This can be done periodically or regularly. In connection with a cleanup in Erie County (Pennsylvania) observational surveys were conducted to assess the scope of discarded vehicles on county roads. After implementing collection and enforcement measures, follow-up observation surveys were completed four to five months later.^{38,§}



Responses to the Problem of Abandoned Vehicles

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: carefully consider whether others in your community share responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it. In some cases, you may need to shift the responsibility of responding toward those who have the capacity to implement more-effective responses. (For more detailed information on shifting and sharing responsibility, see Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*.)



General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy

Few systematic evaluations have been conducted on responses to the problem of abandoned vehicles. Most information on responses comes from brief reports of U.S. initiatives or descriptions of more-extensive U.K. actions. Most U.K. initiatives have resulted from two large-scale policy changes. First is the End-of-Life Vehicle Directive (ELVD) issued by the European Union.³⁹ The ELVD specifies extensive steps to safely dispose of vehicles and their components, together with cost-sharing that adds disposal fees to new cars sold in European Union member states. Second is an enhanced national focus on antisocial behavior as a public safety and disorder problem.⁴⁰ Abandoned vehicles are among the types of disorder linked to this new focus.⁴¹

As a result, the best that can be offered from promising responses is some evidence that more vehicles are being collected, or fewer are being abandoned. In many cases, such evidence is helpful in tailoring responses to your local problem.

Most strategies for dealing with abandoned vehicles will require coordination with agencies and other organizations beyond police. Because so many different stakeholders are involved in the abandoned-vehicle problem, it is usually necessary to work with different individuals and organizations.



It may also be advisable to propose changes in local or state laws for defining and addressing the problem of abandoned vehicles. Police play a major role in vehicle regulation and public safety, and should be prepared to propose changes that would more effectively address problems associated with abandoned vehicles.

Specific Responses to Reduce Abandoned Vehicles

Responses to abandoned vehicles are best considered in two broad categories: those that center on identifying and removing them, and those that prevent vehicles from being dumped.

Removing Abandoned Vehicles

- 1. Identifying and reporting abandoned vehicles.** It is important to have clear guidelines for designating a vehicle as abandoned. This makes it possible for police, other public workers, and private residents to recognize and report them as soon as possible.
 - The Albuquerque (New Mexico) Police Department incorporates a detailed description into its online web site for reporting abandoned vehicles (www.cabq.gov/police/abandonedvehicleform.html).
 - The Philadelphia Police Department online reporting form includes diagrams of cars to aid in reporting vehicle condition and identifying individual vehicles (www.ppdonline.org/rpts/rpts_abanauto_frm.php).
 - The British organization Encams, which collaborates with governments on environmental policy, offers a detailed public information page on abandoned vehicles (www.encams.org/advice/main2.asp?pageid=39).
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As part of a statewide effort to address the abandoned-vehicle problem, Michigan enhanced online information about registration and towing. The "Auto lost and found" web site provides access to police, authorized towing contractors, and vehicle owners. The site also includes a description of different categories of abandoned vehicles, distinguishing junkers from those left on highways after mechanical breakdowns (www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1640_14837-123588--,00.html).

2. Coordinating with other agencies. In addition to police, sanitation department workers make regular trips throughout cities and settled rural areas. Street-cleaning is a regular activity in many cities. Police and other agency personnel who routinely travel through a jurisdiction should be aware of signs that a vehicle is abandoned, and develop standard reporting practices. Parking and street-cleaning regulations can be useful for identifying abandoned vehicles. Street parking can be banned overnight, rendering any vehicle parked after a certain hour eligible for removal.⁴² Periodic no-parking zones, possibly linked to street-cleaning, also make it more difficult to abandon a vehicle inconspicuously among parked cars.

Michael Maxfield



Parking and street-cleaning regulations can be useful for identifying abandoned vehicles.



3. Removing derelict vehicles as quickly as possible.

The longer abandoned vehicles remain on streets, the more likely they are to be targets of vandalism, arson, and other harmful activities. In less populated places, dump sites emerge as the presence of one dumped car begins to attract others. Recognizing that abandoned vehicles are hazardous to traffic, public safety, and the environment, generally, can be an important lever in reducing the interval between reporting and removing. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between derelict vehicles of little value and disabled cars that present immediate traffic hazards. Michigan reduced the time interval for designating vehicles as abandoned in many types of sites from 48 to 24 hours. This reduced the number of cars further damaged by vandals and resulted in more vehicles' being returned to owners.⁴³ A variety of U.K. initiatives have been launched to quickly identify and remove abandoned vehicles. Often this requires reducing the time between identifying and removing a vehicle.

- In Operation Magpie, police in the local areas of Cleveland and Redcar, England, circumvented a required seven-day notice period by immediately removing abandoned vehicles to a central location; after seven days, they could be recycled.⁴⁴
- Operation Cubit, in Kent County, England, reduced the notice period from seven to 15 days to immediate removal for categories of cars.⁴⁵
- Police in Avon and Somerset, England, revised a previous seven-day notice period to allow immediate removal if a vehicle was obviously inoperable. “Communal” vehicles—unregistered but operable cars used by several people—were removed within 30 minutes of identification.⁴⁶



- Many U.S. cities have recently reduced the amount of time that elapses before a tagged vehicle can be removed. In most cases, the shorter time—two to three days—was established in response to citizen complaints, or drains on police resources that resulted from continuing to monitor vehicles over two weeks or more.⁴⁷ You should devote some thought to how abandoned vehicles are tagged. Experience in the United Kingdom indicates that large, conspicuous stickers may attract scavengers or arsonists before a car can be towed.⁴⁸ Anecdotal reports from New York City indicate that scrap-metal scavengers may collect vehicles prominently tagged as abandoned before the sanitation department can tow them.⁴⁹

4. Establishing routines for long-term parking facilities.

Cars abandoned at long-term parking facilities and in areas where it's common for vehicles to be parked for extended periods present special problems. Airport parking lots are examples of facilities where people can park cars unnoticed for extended periods. Boston's Logan Airport starts trying to contact owners after cars have been parked for one month or more.⁵⁰ A maximum time period for legal parking, coupled with daily or other regular inventories, can help identify abandoned vehicles more quickly. License-recognition equipment, used in some airport parking inventories, can automate the process of identifying cars parked for unreasonably long periods.



5. Cleaning up in abandoned vehicle "sweeps." Large-scale cleanup campaigns are most useful in cases where abandoned vehicles have accumulated over some time. Concentrations may occur in specific neighborhoods or citywide in urban areas. Cleanup campaigns have been conducted in cities (Philadelphia; Washington; Detroit; Omaha, Nebraska) and in less populated areas (Erie County, tribal lands). They are sometimes combined with amnesty campaigns (described below) that allow owners to dispose of unwanted cars for free. Or abandoned vehicle sweeps can be combined with cleanup campaigns that target neighborhood blight or illegal dumping.⁵¹ Most such efforts require working with neighborhood and business associations, as well as the usual organizations involved with processing abandoned cars. It may be possible to finance abandoned-vehicle sweeps with grant funds or contributions from business or service organizations.

§Police in Fort Myers (Florida)⁵⁴ worked with business owners and neighborhood residents to clean up trash and junk cars from a commercial strip and nearby residential areas. More than 200 cars were removed, building code violations were cited, stray shopping carts were collected, and vacant lots, generally, were cleaned up.

Since they usually go beyond routine practice, cleanups require three key elements:

- Contracting with towing companies to remove vehicles
- Publicizing the campaign, along with special provisions for reporting vehicles
- Supplementing routines for identifying owners and disposing of vehicles.

Sweeps can be efficient when contracts are issued to towing contractors and scrap yards that will collect and dispose of junk cars. This might include temporary deployment of numerous tow trucks, or renting portable car-crushing equipment.⁵² Rapidly collecting and crushing derelict cars was a key feature of the U.K.'s Operation Cubit, set up in many cities.^{53,§}



- 6. Using community volunteers.** Abandoned-vehicle problems are well-suited to police-citizen collaboration.⁵⁵ Handling the problem of abandoned vehicles every day can be time-consuming. Vehicles must be viewed (either through routine patrol or in response to reports), tagged, revisited after the time window for towing, and towed. Using volunteers can increase reporting and speed the removal of junk cars, without requiring additional uniformed resources. Volunteers can also be trained to identify communal vehicles. Some jurisdictions draw on auxiliary or similar groups of volunteers to help identify, report, and monitor vehicles that appear to be abandoned. San Diego and Claremont (California) are examples of cities that use senior-citizen volunteers to help with traffic control and abandoned-vehicle abatement (www.volunteermatch.org/orgs/org14553.html). Police in Austin, Texas, have used participants in a Volunteers in Policing program to tag and monitor abandoned vehicles (www.ci.austin.tx.us/police/volunteers.htm). London's Metropolitan Police have begun using street wardens as part of a community-based initiative to monitor illegal dumping and abandoned vehicles.⁵⁶
 - 7. Publicizing the problem.** Especially in urban areas, people may not recognize the signs that vehicles are abandoned. Publicity describing how to identify abandoned vehicles by recognizing features of a vehicle's condition can encourage residents to report suspected abandoned/communal vehicles. People living in less populated areas can be urged to report suspected dump sites. U.K. environmental organizations have proposed general publicity campaigns and implemented them in several local areas.⁵⁷ Providing online web forms or distinctive public information campaigns can encourage
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people to report. In East Northhamptonshire, England, the End-of-Life Vehicle Impoundment Scheme (ELVIS) displays a caricature of Elvis Presley singing into a telephone, together with information on how to identify and report abandoned vehicles (www.northants.police.uk/default.asp?action=article&ID=8684). Publicity can also make people aware of opportunities for volunteer service and how to properly dispose of unwanted cars.

Preventing Vehicles from Being Abandoned

8. Making legitimate disposal cheaper and easier.

Eliminating vehicle collection and/or disposal fees reduces incentives for illegal dumping. Local U.K. councils routinely offer free disposal.⁵⁸ This can be especially important for people who can afford to drive only older, unreliable cars, and therefore will be less willing to pay disposal costs. In most cases, the cost of tagging, marking, and collecting abandoned vehicles will be higher than revenue lost from reducing or eliminating fees.⁵⁹ Also, additional trash or hazardous waste may be deposited in abandoned cars that linger on city streets; auto scrap dealers may not accept cars that contain additional waste. Making legitimate disposal easier is also important, especially in less populated areas distant from scrap yards or recyclers.⁶⁰ Periodically arranging for portable car crushers can be useful in rural areas. In some cases, portable car crushers temporarily used to package scrap metal can also accommodate junk vehicles.⁶¹ Or local and county governments might collaborate to buy car crushers that would serve as a regional resource for vehicle disposal.⁶²



- 9. Using amnesty campaigns.** If it is not feasible to reduce or eliminate car disposal fees, it may be possible to organize periodic amnesty periods when people can arrange to have junk vehicles collected for free. These initiatives may be combined with large-scale cleanup campaigns in which towing companies and car scrap businesses are enlisted to cover a particular city or area.⁶³ One comprehensive U.K. initiative offered a reward of about \$15 for turning in a junk car with proper documentation.⁶⁴
 - 10. Promoting private junk-car collection services.** An increasing number of junk-car disposal services have become available in response to increases in scrap metal's value. JunkMyCar.com claims to operate in all states. Users enter a zip code to begin the process of locating an affiliated towing company in the area. Other services offer to collect old cars, which are donated to charities. Local contractors who are affiliated with these consolidation services arrange to collect old vehicles and offer tax deductions for charity contributions. The legitimacy of such services—hidden costs, for example—should be investigated before promoting them. Though no studies exist, it is likely that car owners will use such services more as alternate ways to dispose of junk vehicles legitimately rather than to prevent vehicles from being abandoned.
 - 11. Using publicity to promote legitimate disposal.** Publicity can help prevent vehicles from being dumped by making people aware of how old vehicles can be disposed of, and by alerting the public to additional harms associated with abandoned vehicles. Publicity is best coupled with other initiatives, such as amnesty, free pickup and disposal, or sweeps to collect unwanted cars.⁶⁵ The New York City Sanitation Department includes
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information about how to locate scrap car dealers on its web site for reporting abandoned vehicles. In an effort to encourage cleanups of illegal dumps and abandoned cars on tribal lands, the U.S. EPA described success stories in selected areas.⁶⁶ In the United Kingdom, publicity campaigns use a type of shaming to reduce illegal dumping of cars and other large waste.⁶⁷

12. Increasing the threshold value for scrapping vehicles.

Most jurisdictions distinguish impounded vehicles as having resale or only scrap value. Setting higher thresholds for designating vehicles as having resale value can reduce the number of older, low-cost vehicles that are sold at auction and likely to be abandoned later.⁶⁸ This has greater potential if local dealers sell auctioned cars. If cars valued at less than, say, \$1,500 are crushed and sold as scrap, they cannot later be resold and abandoned. This disrupts the cycle of abandonment, resale, and re-abandonment. U.K. initiatives encourage local governments to scrap a larger proportion of impounded vehicles rather than selling them at auction.⁶⁹ This can also reduce the problem of "invisible" or communal vehicles.⁷⁰ Increasing the threshold for scrapping vehicles is especially appropriate when the value of scrap metal rises.

13. Increasing minimum bids at car auctions. Auctions of old or damaged vehicles can be a source of junk cars that are eventually abandoned or used as unregistered vehicles. Having low minimum bids increases the likelihood that the most decrepit vehicles will be back on the road. Washington, D.C., increased the minimum bid from \$25 to \$500, then later reduced it to \$250 when auction sales declined too sharply.⁷¹ This response requires working with auction houses and related businesses.^{72,§}

§People are more likely to abandon older, low-cost vehicles or use them as community transportation. Restricting the sale of such vehicles can reduce the number of junk cars that are eventually dumped. This can be complicated, since auctions of impounded cars, many of which have been previously collected as abandoned vehicles, may recycle junk cars back to the streets. In addition, businesses that collect or consolidate cars for charity may sell them to auto auction houses and further contribute to the problem.



14. Working with low-end used-car dealers. Responses to increase scrap thresholds and minimum auction bids can affect low-end used-car dealers who buy older cars at auctions for local resale. In some cases, "dealers" may sell very few cars as a sort of part-time business, but still contribute to the flow of older cars back onto the streets, in a kind of gray market for low-cost transportation.⁷³ A side effect of strategies to increase minimum bids at auctions while raising the threshold for scrapping vehicles is the decreased availability of low-end used cars. Police can work with dealers in two ways: (1) describing how the low-end vehicle market contributes to abandoned-vehicle problems, while explaining efforts to reduce that problem; and (2) initiating more careful scrutiny of VIN's and documents.⁷⁴

15. Adjusting rules for parking and street-cleaning. Because unlimited street parking can conceal an abandoned vehicle for extended periods, parking rules that require cars to be moved periodically can increase the difficulty of dumping vehicles on public streets. An extreme example is prohibiting overnight parking, a response that cannot be used where street-parking is common. Areas where overnight street-parking by residents is the norm could implement local-area residential parking permits. This makes it easier to identify cars that are illegally parked, aiding both formal and informal surveillance. Jurisdictions that have regular street-cleaning can also make it more difficult to abandon a vehicle unobtrusively.

16. Securing dump sites. Sites that attract dumping of junk vehicles and other waste usually combine access with lack of surveillance. In urban areas, these include abandoned factories, transportation access roads, and other urban wastelands. People often access dump sites in rural and



less populated areas via rough roads or trails.⁷⁵ Restricting access can prevent dumping at all types of sites. This might include installing or repairing gates. In urban areas, CCTV can add surveillance. Such responses require working with other agencies in the case of government facilities, or with private property owners.⁷⁶

17. Assisting property owners at sites where people dump cars. Some parking lots cannot be fenced or gated; those serving large apartment complexes or shopping malls are examples. You can encourage managers to conduct regular inventories of cars parked on their property. Apartment complexes that offer parking should record tenants' license plate numbers. Such places should also post notice that unauthorized vehicles will be towed. Police can work with owners and managers to develop routines for identifying and removing suspected abandoned vehicles.

18. Assessing cost-of-disposal fees. The European Union ELV directive requires that member countries establish programs for junk vehicles to be properly disposed of at no cost to the last registered owner. Further, effective in 2007, individual countries must require that manufacturers pay for all or most of the cost of disposing of vehicles they produce.⁷⁷ Policies for implementing the directive are still under development, and such legislative initiatives are beyond the scope of local police agencies. However, some U.S. jurisdictions have supplemented local vehicle-registration fees to offset vehicle disposal costs. The city of Juneau, Alaska, added \$22 to the cost of a two-year local vehicle registration to cover the costs of handling an estimated 700 abandoned vehicles each year.⁷⁸ More than 30 years ago, California assessed an abandoned-vehicle abatement fee on all cars registered in the state. That has since devolved to counties, authorizing them to supplement local registration fees to offset vehicle disposal costs.⁷⁹



19. Anticipating seasonal abandonment. If data indicate that people abandon vehicles at some regular interval—the end of summer at seaside communities, or the end of term in university towns—it is advisable to launch publicity and other initiatives in anticipation. In much the same way that jurisdictions prepare for large-scale disposal of shabby furniture in college towns as students move on, amnesty and large-scale cleanups can be launched. If airport parking lots are subject to seasonal dumping, inventories of parked cars can be enhanced during those times. A similar strategy is to develop plans for problems following natural disasters that damage or destroy a lot of vehicles.⁸⁰

Responses with Limited Effectiveness

20. Increasing fines for vehicle abandonment. The cost of tracking down owners of dumped vehicles can quickly exceed the amount recovered through fines. It may not be possible to locate the last registered owner of a dumped vehicle. If found, the last registered owner may claim to have sold or given the car away, or claim that someone stole the car. These difficulties are multiplied in jurisdictions where people abandon a lot of cars.

21. Increasing fees for collecting unwanted vehicles. This response counters the economic incentives that encourage vehicle abandonment. As the cost or difficulty of legitimate disposal increases, people will illegally dump more vehicles.



Appendix: Summary of Responses to Abandoned Vehicles

The table below summarizes the responses to abandoned vehicles, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Removing Abandoned Vehicles</i>					
1	25	Identifying and reporting abandoned vehicles	It distinguishes vehicles parked or left temporarily from those abandoned	...it is accompanied by specific descriptions of vehicle condition and component damage	Time interval and location are important. Vehicles that present immediate traffic hazards, or those left in areas where parking is clearly not permitted, may be considered abandoned. Also distinguish stolen cars that thieves abandon
2	26	Coordinating with other agencies	Departments of sanitation and streets also monitor cars illegally parked and may notice signs of abandonment before police patrol	...interagency protocols or descriptions are clear and widely shared	It depends on agency missions, and on how frequently streets are cleaned



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
3	27	Removing derelict vehicles as quickly as possible	Vehicles that are obviously damaged or derelict may attract vandals or other undesirable users	...awareness of the problem is wide spread, and people are easily able to recognize signs of abandonment	Location is important. Cars presenting immediate hazards or that are burnt out should be removed as quickly as possible. Abandoned vehicles signal and contribute to neighborhood decay
4	28	Establishing routines for long term parking facilities	Abandoned vehicles are more easily concealed among other cars parked at long term facilities like airports. Regular inventories are required to recognize out of place cars	...parking facilities are subject to regular inventory, making long term, out of place cars more easily recognized	Vehicle condition and location—for example, very old junkers parked in expensive short-term lots—may offer clues. Cars may be towed pending owner identification
5	29	Cleaning up in abandoned vehicle “sweeps”	It signals that the problem is being taken seriously, and it can be economical	...a lot of vehicles are concentrated, abandoned cars have accumulated, and contracts can be issued with towing and salvage companies	It may be combined with neighborhood cleanups. It can be scheduled as an annual or periodic effort in less populated areas where legitimate disposal is less convenient
6	30	Using community volunteers	Identifying, tagging, and monitoring possible abandoned vehicles is time consuming and might be set aside as a low priority activity. Citizen volunteers increase monitoring, and area residents have stakes in neighborhood quality of life	...citizen volunteer programs exist in police or other departments, and abandoned cars are considered a quality of life problem in urban areas	It may be combined with other community policing initiatives, or started as an initial community policing activity. Local businesses may also support it. It may be combined with periodic cleanup campaigns



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
7	30	Publicizing the problem	Reporting possible abandoned vehicles requires that people know what to look for, and that junk cars are problems. It publicizes collateral problems such as hazards to children and criminal uses of abandoned cars	...reporting can be made easier via web sites or other initiatives, and it is coupled with initiatives to collect abandoned cars. It may attract more support if combined with other cleanup efforts	Distinguish old cars from abandoned cars. Some viewed as abandoned may be used as sources for spare parts; this should be examined in the problem-assessment stage
<i>Preventing Vehicles from Being Abandoned</i>					
8	31	Making legitimate disposal cheaper and easier	It offers a less costly and legal route to dispose of unwanted vehicles; low income people are more likely to drive older cars and less able to afford disposal fees. Illegal dumping generally increases if legal disposal becomes more difficult	...free pickup and disposal, or convenient pickup, is available	It may cost more in rural or remote areas, but these places will be most in need of more convenient disposal
9	32	Using amnesty campaigns	Like periodic bulk trash pickup, periodic free disposal targets accumulations of junk cars	...it is widely publicized and offered regularly	It may require contracting with towing and scrap companies



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
10	32	Promoting junk car collection services	The increased value of scrap metal has made junk cars more valuable; it appears to be a growing market as private firms contract with local towing companies	...services contain no hidden fees, services are widely publicized, and there is information on local web sites	It is more difficult to recover cars from remote areas, so services may add collection fees. It may be possible to negotiate pickups in connection with sweeps
11	32	Using publicity to promote legitimate disposal	It appeals to public understanding of the harms caused by abandoned vehicles. There is some element of shaming	...it is coupled with information on how to dispose of junk cars	Combine this response with the promotion of car collection services
12	33	Increasing the threshold value for scrapping vehicles	It reduces the number of low cost vehicles available for purchase; scrapped vehicles cannot return to streets to be abandoned again later	...the value of scrap metal is high—it has increased since 2001—and the market for scrapped vehicles is readily available	It requires cooperation from auto auction operations and dealers
13	33	Increasing minimum bids at car auctions	Very low bids mean people buy junk cars more often and later abandon them. Increasing bids reduces sales of junkers	...it is coupled with response 12	It requires cooperation from auto auction operations or from some authority that regulates auction terms



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
14	34	Working with low end used car dealers	They may be a source for very low cost, unreliable cars that are later abandoned. It signals to dealers that their role is of interest	...police have a routine role in inspecting auto dealers, and there is legitimate scrutiny of used car practices	Consult with auto dealer associations
15	34	Adjusting rules for parking and street-cleaning	It increases the routine monitoring of streets, which reduces the ability to conceal abandoned cars among legally parked cars	...the rules are implemented in urban areas where on-street parking is the norm, and parking enforcement and street cleaning personnel can easily arrange to have vehicles tagged/towed	It acts to regularly churn parked cars, making those not moved more visible and subject to collection. It requires the capacity to monitor and tow cars in violation
16	34	Securing dump sites	It removes access to places where people dump vehicles	...access can be readily restricted, or access is limited to a narrow road or gate	It requires property owners' cooperation. It might be costly. It might be combined with CCTV monitoring
17	35	Assisting property owners at sites where people dump cars	It educates property owners to recognize, respond to, and prevent vehicle abandonment; vehicles are detected and removed earlier	...parking lots or other facilities cannot be secured, long-term parking is a norm, and it is possible to keep a list of authorized users	It requires property owners' cooperation. It may be combined with other initiatives in multiunit parking facilities, such as CCTV
18	35	Assessing cost of disposal fees	It produces a revenue stream to offset the costs of handling abandoned vehicles	...local registration is in place, and it is a supplement to local registration fees	Cost-sharing with manufacturers, as in Europe, is not likely in the United States. A previous statewide fund in California devolved to local governments



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
19	36	Anticipating seasonal abandonment	It provides increased publicity or junk-car collection capacity during times when abandonment is more likely	...seasonal patterns of abandonment are evident—resort areas or places with large numbers of students are examples—and an added capacity for collecting cars can be readily deployed	It is similar to planning for natural disasters, where a lot of vehicles may be damaged or destroyed
<i>Responses With Limited Effectiveness</i>					
20	36	Increasing fines for vehicle abandonment	It requires identifying and locating vehicle owners		It can be very time-consuming. Police may locate previous owners who have sold the vehicle, or they may not locate any owner. It is very resource-intensive
21	36	Increasing fees to collect unwanted vehicles	It is likely to increase abandonment by increasing costs of legitimate disposal		Locate private-sector towing companies and scrap dealers who will collect vehicles at lower costs



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Michael G. Maxfield, is Professor of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University, Newark. He is the author of articles and books on a variety of topics—victimization, policing, homicide, community corrections, and long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect. He is the coauthor (with Earl Babbie) of the textbook, *Research Methods for Criminal Justice and Criminology*, now in its fifth edition, and coeditor of two volumes in the *Crime Prevention Studies* series: *Understanding and Preventing Car Theft* (with Ronald Clarke), and *Surveying Crime in the 21st Century* (with Mike Hough). Formerly a Visiting Fellow at the National Institute of Justice, Maxfield has worked with a variety of public agencies and other organizations acting as a consultant and advocate of frugal evaluation for justice policy. Recent projects collaborate with police departments and other justice agencies in the areas of repeat domestic violence, performance measurement systems, and auto theft. Professor Maxfield received his Ph.D. in political science from Northwestern University.



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