

# Why Higher Fees for Law Enforcement Calls?

I am a tow man's wife and I dispatch drivers for our small, local tow service. Recently, a lady called me and demanded to know why we charged \$125 to tow her car after a wreck. Hearing the rate, I quickly told her that it was the standard fee for a law enforcement call during the week when our trucks are on police rotation. She informed me that "It wasn't that bad of a wreck, just a fender bender, the car didn't really need to be towed, it could have just been pushed out of the way, there was no clean-up," etc. I learned from her that the wreck was not her fault, but that somebody's insurance had to pay that fee and she thought it was outrageous. Of course I tried to explain to her that all the wrecker services on the rotation charge higher fees for law enforcement calls and I tried to explain why, but I don't think she wanted to listen. It is my sincere desire, on behalf of all honest wrecker services everywhere, to explain why that fee is higher than a private tow.

When the police, sheriff's department or highway patrol calls for a wrecker, they don't want to schedule an appointment. It is our job to get to the scene as quickly as possible and do whatever needs to be done. We pick up impounds, remove wrecked vehicles, and clean up debris. The officials want our streets, highways and county roads cleared and cleaned as quickly as possible to make them safe for other drivers.

Law enforcement dispatchers do not tell us: "Oh, it isn't very bad, you won't need any Oil Dry or brooms. It's just a fender bender, and let's say this is probably just a \$50 wreck."

We have been told on a few occasions to bring extra Oil Dry because,

"It's a mess." That "mess" can be glass and metal, fluids or debris blowing out of open vehicles. Unfortunately, that debris and fluid can be human in origin and, yes ma'am, we have to clear that away too.

Not too long ago, one of my drivers had to retrieve 500 picnic napkins that escaped from a rolled-over camper and were blowing in the wind.

Think about this please – that tow driver is intent on getting his job done and even with traffic control and the occasional orange warning cone, he is in a high-risk situation. Rubberneckers get too close, and the folks who are angry about being delayed to their destinations rush by too fast and too close.

Our hours of operation are 24/7, 365 days a year and we don't get "snow days." Foul weather is our busiest time.

Our insurance rates on wreckers are extremely expensive as we have to carry coverage for "on-hook" cargo.

We have higher workman's comp because of the risk involved, and our fuel bills are through the roof. Those rigs are expensive to purchase and expensive to maintain.

We respect law enforcement agencies and when they call, we come. They don't want to have to answer a lot of detailed questions or provide trivial information. They want the streets cleared, or they want that drunk driver's car locked up while he/she sobers up, or the drug dealer's car impounded for search. They call, we say "what and where" and we go.

I understand the caller's indignation, but her accusations of price gouging were unfounded. That rate is the same rate for any law enforcement call, not just her particular

wreck. Our rate for private calls and tows is less, of course, but those we do at the caller's convenience, and we do have to put those on hold when police calls come in.

Private tows usually take about 45 minutes (in the city limits) but police calls take as long as it takes to get the job done. In some instances, it gets very labor intensive. Case in point: our company had to clear away an entire semi trailer load of manhole covers and sealer rings from a semi involved in a very tragic accident. That took extra people and about 36 hours. After an incident, we usually have insurance adjustor and/or law enforcement issues to deal with. These folks need access to our impound lot, and we give them our time and attention. People whose vehicles have been totaled and cleared by insurance for release are assisted in the removal of their personal belongings, and that takes time and attention as well.

The phone and office get really busy right after our turn on rotation, and the abuse can get very nasty. I have been called everything but human and have been threatened with everything from lawsuits to bodily harm.

I find myself explaining everything I have just detailed over and over. I know I'm not alone in hoping that this will find its way into print and clear up some questions. Yes, there are some unscrupulous acts in this profession, and I think that *is* horrific. But, what this lady was decrying was not illegal, immoral or fattening.

So in conclusion, ma'am, you have a nice day, and I hope you don't ever have another wreck. But if you do, call your own wrecker service before the police do, you have that right. If you don't, or can't, they will call the service "on-call" and it's a pretty safe bet that the fee will be higher. But at least (I hope) you'll understand why.