

Definition of an Abandoned Motor Vehicle under Alabama Law

Section 32-13-1, *Code of Alabama 1975*, defines an abandoned motor vehicle* as follows:

- (1) Which has been left by the owner, or some person acting for the owner, with an automobile dealer, repairman or wrecker service for repair or for some other reason and has not been called for by the owner or other person within a period of 60 days after the time agreed upon and within 60 days after the vehicle is turned over to a dealer, repairman or wrecker service when no time is agreed upon, or within 60 days after the completion of necessary repairs.
- (2) Which is left unattended on a public street, road, or highway or other public property for a period of at least seven days; or which is unattended because the driver of the vehicle has been arrested or is impaired by an accident which causes the need for the vehicle to be immediately removed as determined necessary by the law enforcement officer, or which is subject to an impoundment order for outstanding traffic or parking violations; or left unattended continuously for at least seven days in a business district or a residence district; or if left unattended in a business district that has at least one posted notice in an open and conspicuous place indicating that there is a time limitation on the length of time a motor vehicle may remain parked in the district and the motor vehicle remains unattended for a period of time in excess of that posted on the notice; or left unattended in a business district or residence district that has at least one posted notice indicating that only authorized motor vehicles may park in that district and the owner of the motor vehicle or his or her agent has not received the required authority prior to leaving the motor vehicle unattended; or left unattended on a private road or driveway without the express or implied permission of the owner or lessee of the driveway or their agent. A posted notice when required by this chapter shall meet the following specifications:
 - a. The notice shall be prominently placed at each driveway access or curb cut allowing vehicular access to the property, within five feet from the public right-of-way line. If there are no curbs or access barriers, the signs must be posted not less than one sign each 25 feet of lot frontage.
 - b. The notice shall clearly indicate, in not less than two inch high light-reflective letters on a contrasting background, that unauthorized vehicles will be towed away at the owner's expense. The words "tow away zone" shall be included on the sign in not less than four inch high letters.
 - c. The notice shall also provide the name and current telephone number of the person or firm towing or removing the vehicles, if the property owner, lessor, or person in control of the property has a written contract with a wrecker service.
 - d. The sign structure containing the required notices shall be permanently installed with the bottom of the sign not less than four feet above ground level, and be continuously maintained on the property for not less than 24 hours prior to the towing or removal of any vehicles.
- (3) Which has been lawfully towed onto the property of another at the written request of a law-enforcement officer and left there for a period of not less than 60 days without anyone having made claim thereto.
- (4) Which has been abandoned, has an expired license plate, or is inoperable in a parking area on private property maintained by the property owner or his or her agent for use by his or her tenants, residents, or their guests. A vehicle shall be defined as abandoned or inoperable under this subdivision if it has an expired license plate or has remained in the same parking lot for a period of 30 days or more. To bring a vehicle within the provisions of this subdivision, the property owner or his or her agent shall post a dated notice in a conspicuous place on the vehicle in question stating:
 - a. That the vehicle has been determined to be abandoned or inoperable and will be removed at the direction of the property owner or his or her agent upon the expiration of seven days from the date of the notice.
 - b. The name and address of the last registered owner of the vehicle in question and the name and address of the property owner or his or her agent and a daytime phone number for the person giving the notice.

A copy of the notice shall be mailed by regular mail to the last known address of the registered owner, if ascertainable, on the date of posting or not later than the next business day. Calculation of the seven-day notice period shall commence on the date of posting of the notice on the vehicle.

** NOTE: Section 32-8-2, *Code of Alabama 1975*, defines a motor vehicle as either:

- a. Every automobile, motorcycle, mobile trailer, semitrailer, truck, truck tractor, trailer and other device that is self-propelled or drawn, in, upon, or by which any person or property is or may be transported or drawn upon a public highway except such as is moved by animal power or used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks.
- b. Every trailer coach and travel trailer manufactured upon a chassis or undercarriage as an integral part thereof drawn by a self-propelled vehicle.

A manufactured home is not defined as a motor vehicle under Section 32-8-2, and cannot be transferred as an abandoned motor vehicle.