

§ 20-108. Vehicles or component parts of vehicles without manufacturer's numbers.

(a) Any person who knowingly buys, receives, disposes of, sells, offers for sale, conceals, or has in his possession any motor vehicle, or engine or transmission or component part which has been stolen or removed from a motor vehicle and from which the manufacturer's serial or engine number or other distinguishing number or identification mark or number placed thereon under assignment from the Division has been removed, defaced, covered, altered, or destroyed for the purpose of concealing or misrepresenting the identity of said motor vehicle or engine or transmission or component part is guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor.

(b) The Commissioner and such officers and inspectors of the Division of Motor Vehicles as he has designated may take and possess any motor vehicle or component part if its engine number, vehicle identification number, or manufacturer's serial number has been altered, changed, or obliterated or if such officer has probable cause to believe that the driver or person in charge of the motor vehicle or component part has violated subsection (a) above. Any officer who so takes possession of a motor vehicle or component part shall immediately notify the Division of Motor Vehicles and the rightful owner, if known. The notification shall contain a description of the motor vehicle or component part and any other facts that may assist in locating or establishing the rightful ownership thereof or in prosecuting any person for a violation of the provisions of this Article.

(c) Within 15 days after seizure of a motor vehicle or component part pursuant to this section, the Division shall send notice by certified mail to the person from whom the property was seized and to all claimants to the property whose interest or title is in the registration records in the Division of Motor Vehicles that the Division has taken custody of the motor vehicle or component part. The notice shall also contain the following information:

- (1) The name and address of the person or persons from whom the motor vehicle or component part was seized;
- (2) A statement that the motor vehicle or component part has been seized for investigation as provided in this section and that the motor vehicle or component part will be released to the rightful owner:
 - a. Upon a determination that the identification number has not been altered, changed, or obliterated; or
 - b. Upon presentation of satisfactory evidence of the ownership of the motor vehicle or component part if no other person claims an interest in it within 30 days of the date the notice is mailed. Otherwise, a hearing regarding the disposition of the motor vehicle or component part may take place in a court having jurisdiction.
- (3) The name and address of the officer to whom evidence of ownership of the motor vehicle or component part may be presented; and
- (4) A copy statement of the text contained in this section.

(d) Whenever a motor vehicle or component part comes into the custody of an officer, the Division of Motor Vehicles may commence a civil action in the District Court in the county in which the motor vehicle or component part was seized to determine whether the motor vehicle or component part should be destroyed, sold, converted to the use of the Division or otherwise disposed of by an order of the court. The Division shall give notice of the commencement of such an action to the person from whom the motor vehicle or component part was seized and all claimants to the property whose interest or title is in the registration records of the Division of Motor Vehicles. Notice shall be by certified mail sent within 10 days after the filing of the action. In addition, any possessor of a motor vehicle or component part described in this section may commence a civil action under the provisions of this section, to

which the Division of Motor Vehicles may be made a party, to provide for the proper disposition of the motor vehicle or component part.

(e) Nothing in this section shall preclude the Division of Motor Vehicles from returning a seized motor vehicle or component part to the owner following presentation of satisfactory evidence of ownership, and, if determined necessary, requiring the owner to obtain an assignment of an identification number for the motor vehicle or component part from the Division of Motor Vehicles.

(f) No court order providing for disposition shall be issued unless the person from whom the motor vehicle or component was seized and all claimants to the property whose interest or title is in the registration records in the Division of Motor Vehicles are provided a postseizure hearing by the court having jurisdiction. Ten days' notice of the postseizure hearing shall be given by certified mail to the person from whom the motor vehicle was seized and all claimants to the property whose interest or title is in the registration records in the Division of Motor Vehicles. If such motor vehicle or component part has been held or identified as evidence in a pending civil or criminal action or proceeding, no final disposition of such motor vehicle or component part shall be ordered without prior notice to the parties in said proceeding.

(g) At a hearing held pursuant to any action filed by the Division to determine the disposition of any motor vehicle or component part seized pursuant to this section, the court shall consider the following:

- (1) If the evidence reveals either that the motor vehicle or component part identification number has not been altered, changed or obliterated or that the identification number has been altered, changed, or obliterated but satisfactory evidence of ownership has been presented, the motor vehicle or component part shall be returned to the person entitled to it. If ownership cannot be established, nothing in this section shall preclude the return of said motor vehicle or component part to a good faith purchaser following the presentation of satisfactory evidence of ownership thereof and, if necessary, upon the good faith purchaser's obtaining an assigned number from the Division of Motor Vehicles and posting a reasonable bond for a period of three years. The amount of the bond shall be set by the court.
- (2) If the evidence reveals that the motor vehicle or component part identification number has been altered, changed, or obliterated and satisfactory evidence of ownership has not been presented, the motor vehicle or component part shall be destroyed, sold, converted to the use of the Division of Motor Vehicles or otherwise disposed of, as provided for by order of the court.

(h) At the hearing, the Division shall have the burden of establishing, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the motor vehicle or component part has been stolen or that its identification number has been altered, changed, or obliterated.

(i) At the hearing any claimant to the motor vehicle or component part shall have the burden of providing satisfactory evidence of ownership.

(j) An officer taking into custody a motor vehicle or component part under the provisions of this section is authorized to obtain necessary removal and storage services, but shall incur no personal liability for such services. The person or company so employed shall be entitled to reasonable compensation as a claimant under (e), and shall not be deemed an unlawful possessor under (a). (1937, c. 407, s. 72; 1965, c. 621, s. 2; 1973, c. 1149, ss. 1, 2; 1975, c. 716, s. 5; 1983, c. 592; 1985, c. 764, s. 22; 1985 (Reg. Sess., 1986), c. 852, s. 17; 1993, c. 539, s. 349; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c).)