
Deficiency in Kern County Sheriff's Vehicle-Release Process

From Manager of I.T. <christinetaylor702@msn.com>

Date Tue 9/29/2026 11:11 PM

To ClerkofBoard <clerkofboard@kerncounty.com>; NATALIE MCGILL <MCGILLN@kernsheriff.org>; SHERIFF
INTERNAL AFFAIRS <internalaffairs@kernsheriff.org>; Cristina Gutierrez <cgutierrez@kerncounty.com>

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links, open attachments, or provide information unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

No law supports Kern County's current process

The current vehicle-release process used by the Kern County Sheriff's Office creates an unnecessary and avoidable burden on residents. The workflow requires documents that are locked inside the impounded vehicle, forcing people into a circular process that delays release and increases costs.

NO Kern County policy that requires the multi-trip, circular release process.

Tow-yard storage fees are approximately **\$250 per day**. The Sheriff's multi-trip requirement directly increases these costs by causing avoidable delays.

Key Problem

Residents must make **three separate round trips** between Tow Yards and the Sheriff's Office because:

- Registration and insurance documents are **inside the impounded vehicle**.
- Tow yards will not allow access without a **Property Release Form**.
- The Sheriff will not issue the **Vehicle Release Form** without the documents locked inside the vehicle.

This creates a **closed-loop barrier** that prevents timely retrieval of vehicles.

No law supports Kern County's current process. The process is a local administrative decision, not a legal requirement. The law actually supports faster, simpler, electronic release procedures.

There is NO Kern County policy that requires the multi-trip, circular release process. The only official policies cover fees and abandoned-vehicle abatement — not release procedures. The Sheriff's current workflow is an internal administrative choice, not a legal or policy requirement.

What the Law *Actually* Says

1. Vehicle Code §22651 (towing authority)

This law explains *when* a vehicle may be towed. It does **not** require physical registration or insurance documents to release the vehicle.

2. Vehicle Code §22655.5 (release of impounded vehicles)

This law requires the agency to release the vehicle to the **lawful owner**. It does **not** require the owner to show physical documents if the agency can verify ownership electronically.

3. Vehicle Code §14604 (insurance verification)

This law requires law enforcement to ensure the driver has insurance. It **allows electronic verification** and **does not require physical proof** if the information is available through DMV or insurer databases.

4. DMV Electronic Verification Systems

California DMV provides electronic access to:

- registration status
- ownership
- insurance verification

Law enforcement agencies statewide use these systems. Kern County *chooses not to*, but nothing in law prevents them.

The whole system is outdated and needs to be updated so people can get their cars back faster and without unnecessary trips or extra fees.

What Kern County's Actual Policies Say

1. Sheriff's Office Policy J-2700 – Vehicle Impound Fees

Source: Kern County Sheriff's Office Policies and Procedures

This policy covers:

- Administrative fees for releasing impounded vehicles
- Fee amounts (\$100–\$165 depending on hearing)
- Payment rules (cash/check only)
- Exceptions for stolen vehicles
- Notice requirements under California Vehicle Code

What it does NOT cover:

- How many trips a resident must make
- Whether documents must be physically shown
- Whether documents can be verified electronically
- Whether Records can email or fax release forms
- Whether tow yards must deny access to the vehicle

Conclusion: This policy **does not support** the multi-trip process. It only covers **fees**, not release procedures.

2. Kern County Ordinance – Abandoned/Wrecked Vehicles (Chapter 10.28)

Source: Kern County Code of Ordinances, Title 10, Chapter 10.28

This ordinance covers:

- Removal of abandoned or wrecked vehicles
- 30-day notice requirements
- Hearing rights
- Nuisance abatement
- Low-value vehicle disposal rules

What it does NOT cover:

- Release procedures for impounded vehicles
- Requirements for registration/insurance documents
- Multi-trip workflows
- Tow-yard access rules
- Sheriff Records procedures

Conclusion: This ordinance deals with **abandoned vehicles**, not impound releases. It **does not support** the Sheriff's current process.

3. Bakersfield Police Department (City) Release Rules

Source: Bakersfield Police Department Vehicle Release Rules (City, not County)

These rules say:

- Vehicle must be registered
- Owner must have ID
- Owner can authorize release by notarized letter
- Tow fees are separate

What they do NOT say:

- That documents must be physically retrieved from inside the vehicle
- That multiple trips are required
- That Records cannot verify identity electronically
- That tow yards must deny access to the vehicle

Conclusion: Even the City of Bakersfield does **not** use the circular process Kern County uses.

Recommended corrective actions.

1. Phone Verification (If Electronic Documents Are Allowed)

How it works:

- You call Records.
- They ask for:
 - Your **full name**
 - Your **driver's license number**
 - Your **date of birth**
 - The **vehicle license plate** or VIN
- They look you up in the DMV system.

This is how most California agencies already verify identity for releases.

Recommended corrective action 2

2. Email Verification (Electronic Release Documents)

How it works:

- You email Records from your personal email.
- You attach a photo of your **driver's license**.
- They match your ID to the DMV record.
- They email you the release form.

This eliminates the need to drive to Norris Road.

Recommended corrective action 3

3. Fax Verification (If Fax Release Is Implemented)

How it works:

- You fax a copy of your driver's license.
- Records verifies your identity through DMV.
- They fax the release directly to the tow yard.

This is used by many California police departments.

Recommended corrective action 3

4. Online Portal Verification (If Implemented)

How it works:

- You log in using your driver's license number and date of birth.
- The system checks DMV records.
- You download your release form.

This is the most modern option.

Recommended corrective action 4

5. Owner Self-Attestation Form

How it works:

- You sign a simple statement saying: "My registration and insurance are inside my impounded vehicle."
- You show your driver's license.
- Records verifies your identity through DMV.
- They issue the release without needing the physical documents.

This solves the "documents locked in the glove box" problem.

I also want to point out that **Records can verify a person's identity very easily** without needing the registration or insurance first.

They can check a person's identity by looking at their **driver's license** and matching it to DMV records.

This can be done by email, or over the phone.

This simple step would allow the Sheriff's Office to issue release documents without forcing people to make multiple trips.

I am asking the Board to review this issue and consider updating the process so it works better for the public.

BY ORDER OF THE BD/SUPV

Referred To _____

Copies Furnished Each Supervisor,
CAO, Co. Captains, Sheriff

Date _____

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

By J. Keenan, Deputy