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## Insurance News

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### **Dallas' auto insurance rule not a liability at all**

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Six weeks have passed since the city of Dallas began towing cars of drivers without liability insurance.

And guess what? Despite all the dire predictions to the contrary, the sky hasn't fallen. And a few more drivers may actually have insurance coverage.

Somebody say "amen."

Here's some good news to relish. And it's the rarest kind: A new government policy is working well.

In opposing the towing ordinance, Dallas City Council members representing the southern half of the city said the new policy would swamp the city's auto pound.

Hasn't happened.

Dallas police Lt. Michael Carew is unit commander over the West Dallas auto pound. It has space for 2,342 vehicles.

"Before the towing for no insurance started, we were at about 60 percent usage," Carew said. "Since the towing for no insurance began, we've fluctuated between 61 and 67 percent usage. And that's it."

But that's not to say the new policy is having no effect. "We're on pace now for an additional 12,000 tows this year," he said.

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That's a healthy number – 12,000 – and one that ought to grab the attention of every uninsured driver.

A tow costs the vehicle owner \$95, plus a \$20 impound fee. Then there's a \$20 charge for each additional day, plus a \$50 notification fee for vehicles left more than 48 hours.

*And* drivers have to show proof they have purchased insurance before they can reclaim their impounded vehicles.

Because that's all so expensive, towing opponents predicted that people too poor to buy insurance would also be too poor to reclaim their cars.

Wrong again.

"Right now, 82 percent of vehicles impounded for no insurance have already been released," Carew said. "And 73 percent of releases were within 72 hours."

That's actually a higher retrieval rate than the auto pound's overall average. Last fiscal year, 76 percent of impounded vehicles were eventually claimed.

Another dire prediction was that the towing policy would create long waits for wreckers across the city, tying up accident scenes and wasting officers' valuable time.

Again, police supervisors say, it hasn't happened.

Lt. Scott Bratcher oversees accident investigations for the Police Department. "We haven't seen much of that at all," he said.

"The officers aren't complaining of undue wrecker delays, and I don't think it's slowing down our enforcement efforts at all. We're right on our mark," he said.

The auto pound's Carew said he would be hearing gripes from officers if wrecker delays were a problem. And he's not hearing a thing.

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"It seems to be running pretty smoothly," he said.

And last, the critics said uninsured drivers will never buy liability insurance because they simply don't have the money – blood from a turnip and all that.

That's not what insurance agents report.

"It's a little early to tell, but it seems to be working," said Jerry Johns, a spokesman for the Texas insurance industry. "We know from anecdotal information that it definitely has the attention of uninsured drivers."

Agents report that any publicity about the towing policy prompts a fresh batch of calls to their offices.

"It's not dramatic, but it goes up," Johns said.

Seems to me that really only one question remains: Why hasn't every city adopted a towing policy?

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