

# How to Get a Title to an Abandoned Vehicle

If you find an abandoned vehicle on your property, you may want to obtain the vehicle's title so you can legally repurpose the vehicle. The process of obtaining the title of an abandoned vehicles varies from state-to-state and can be quite...

Part 1 of 3:

## Determining if a Vehicle is Abandoned

1.



**Know your state's definition of abandoned vehicles.** Different states have different qualifications that need to be met in order to consider a car abandoned. Make sure the car is officially an abandoned vehicle before making any attempts to obtain the title.

1. A motor vehicle is a vehicle that has been left unattended on the property of another person. However, a certain amount of time must pass before it can be considered abandoned. Timeframes vary by state and sometimes even by county. In New York, for example, the vehicle must remain unattended for at least 96 hours before it's considered abandon.<sup>[1]</sup>
2. You can find out the qualifications in your state either by visiting your local Department of Motor Vehicles or browsing the local DMV website.

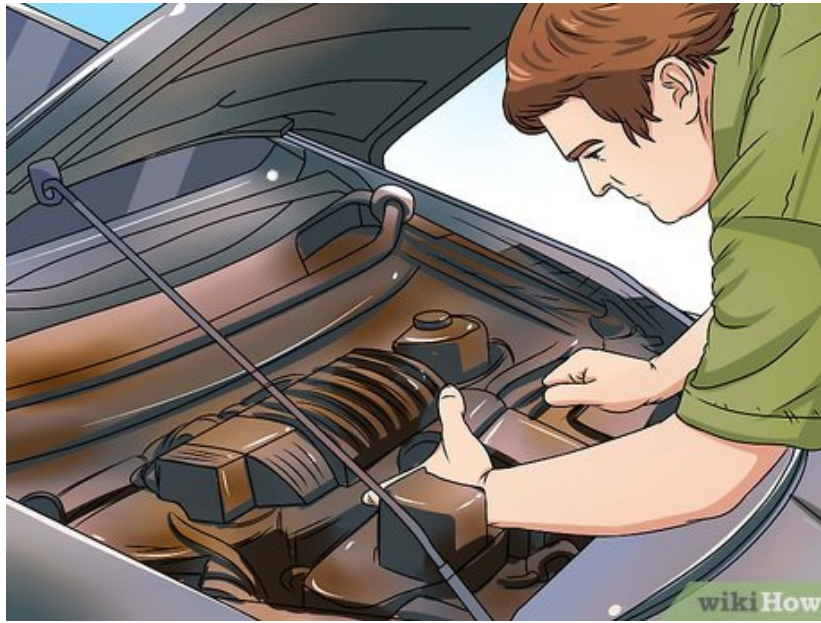


2.

**Look over your options in regards to an abandoned vehicle.** The process for obtaining a title is different in each state. Make sure you know what your legal rights are in regards to an abandoned vehicle in your state.

1. If the vehicle was not found on your property, it will most likely be towed and then held by an automobile business. If the owner does not reclaim the vehicle after a certain timeframe, and the vehicle is worth less than a certain fee, the vehicle will be considered unclaimed. The timeframe and value varies by state. Once a vehicle is marked unclaimed, it will likely be sold at a public auction to the highest bidder. If you purchase an unclaimed vehicle at an auction, you will receive the vehicle and the title shortly after your bid is collected.<sup>[2]</sup>
2. In some states, even if the vehicle is found on your property it might still be auctioned. This is usually if the vehicle is worth more than a certain amount. You should always contact local authorities before trying to claim a title on an abandoned vehicle.<sup>[3]</sup>
3. In other states, you can purchase the vehicle from the original owner if it's found on your property. The owner might also opt to simply transfer the title to you.
4. Check your state's DMV website to see what the policies are in your area in regards to the possibility of obtaining an abandoned vehicle's title.

3.



**Examine the vehicle.** Oftentimes, vehicles are abandoned for a reason. They may be run down, unsafe, or otherwise unusable. Take a quick look at the vehicle, preferably with the help of a mechanic, and determine whether it's worth pursuing the title. You might simply want to contact the state to have it towed and scrapped if it's not worth salvaging.

Part 2 of 3:

## Contacting the Owner

1.



**Find the vehicle's VIN number.** In order to obtain the title of an abandoned vehicle, you must first locate the owner. The vehicle's VIN number can help you do so.

1. Usually, the VIN is found on the lower left corner of the dashboard right in front of the steering wheel. Usually, you can read the number by looking through the windshield. However, if the number is obscured you do have other options.<sup>[4]</sup>
2. The VIN is also located on the front engine block, which you can find by popping the hood and looking under the engine.<sup>[5]</sup>
3. It might also be on the front of the car, under the container that holds windshield fluid.<sup>[6]</sup>
4. If you can open the car door, look underneath where the side view mirror is located when the door is shut. You can also check near the spot where the door latches, close to the seatbelt return.<sup>[7]</sup>

2.



**Visit the DMV.** Once you have the car's VIN number, visit your local DMV. They can help you track down the owner.

1. In most states, the owner will be notified by certified mail that you are attempting to obtain his vehicle's title. The sheriff in the county where the vehicle is abandoned will also be notified. There will also be publications regarding the vehicle published in the country where it was abandoned for a couple of weeks.<sup>[8]</sup>
2. Notifications will include a complete description of the car, including its year, model, and license plate number. It will also include any fees the owner may have to pay for the vehicle's removal.<sup>[9]</sup>

3.



**See if you can legally purchase the vehicle from the previous owner.** As previously stated, the state might opt to sell the vehicle at a public auctions. This means, to obtain the title you will have to enter a bid. It's easier to simply purchase the car and obtain the title from the previous owner. See if you can do so in your state.

1. In order to purchase the vehicle from the owner, you will need to draft a bill that includes the date, your name, the vehicle's year, make, and identification number, purchase price, and the signature of the current owner.
2. The owner may be willing to sign the title over to you free of charge. In this case, you would probably need a Sales Tax Exemption Certificate Transfer Affidavit. However, this form might not be required in all states. Talk to your local DMV about what to do in the event the original owner simply wants to transfer the title to you.

4.



**Familiarize yourself with the necessary forms.** Paperwork varies state-by-state. In some states, there is initial paperwork you must fill out detailing the original condition and location of an abandoned vehicle. In other states, you need to fill out a notification of sale and other documents regarding the transaction. There also might be fees in your state regarding receiving a vehicles title. Visit your local DMV or call them during operating hours with any questions regarding forms and fees.

Part 3 of 3:

## Coping with Problems in the Process



**Figure out how to deal with a lost title.** Cars are often abandoned in hectic times of an owner's life. Therefore, it's not uncommon that the owner lost the original title. If this is the case, obtaining the title yourself can be difficult but not impossible.

1. The owner can apply for a duplicate title at a DMV office. This is probably the easiest way to replace the lost title, although there might be some fees involved depending on the state.
2. The owner might not want to take the time to apply for a duplicate title. In this case, you can have him sign power of attorney over the vehicle to you. This will authorize you to request the duplicate title yourself.

2.



**Prepare to take the previous owner to small claims court.** The previous owner might refuse to transfer the title to you, even if he has no intention of claiming the car. There are a number of reasons for this, the most likely of which is the original owner is trying to draw out the process to get more money out of you. In this case, you can take the owner to small claim's court.

1. Contact a small claim's court in your area and explain the situation. Someone at the court house should be able to explain the process of filing a claim to you.
2. If your case does not pan out in small claims court, you can obtain a writ of execution from the county clerk which you would then bring to the sheriff's office. You should bring this alongside a copy of the car's DMV record and a letter from you indicating the car can legally be seized. You may be able to then obtain the title by entering a credit bid to the state.
3. You should only go the small claim's court route if the vehicle is found on your property.

3.



**Know how to obtain the title if the previous owner cannot be located.** Sometimes, it's difficult to locate the car's previous owner. Contact an attorney and see if you can attempt a quiet title. This is a court action that allows you to obtain judgement that would award the car to you.

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