

I would like to share our experience with a local tow company and our thoughts regarding tougher regulations for Oregon tow companies.

In August of 2016 we had a horrible experience with Discount Towing. I'm sure, by now, most of you have seen the news coverage of Discount Towing and their predatory towing practices. My boyfriend, Jason, decided to take our nephew fishing on the Santiam with our kayaks. They headed down to Jefferson and Jason dropped our two kayaks off at the river and left our 16 year old nephew there with them. Not wanting to leave our nephew for too long on his own, Jason headed up to the parking lot above to quickly park. Because he was in a hurry, he was not paying attention to posted signs.

A few hours later, I received a phone call from our nephew's Mom asking why Jason's truck was sitting on a tow truck on the side of I-5, I was baffled. She then turned around and went back to where the truck was sitting and talked to the driver. The driver let her know that he had broken down after picking up our vehicle from the Jefferson Thriftway as it was parked in a customer only zone. She stated that her son was with the owner of the vehicle and asked if she could get into the vehicle to see if any of his belongings were inside. The young man allowed her to slide the back windows open and access the cab of our truck! In the process, the seal on our back window was peeled off. This could have been anyone and they were allowed to access our vehicle on the side of one of the busiest freeways on the west coast.

Once we determined what had happened, we reached out to Discount Towing immediately. The man who answered stated that he was in a truck and didn't have an exact figure for us but that he thought it would be between "\$800 and \$1200." We were stunned. We thought that it had to be an error. The employee also told us that they would only accept cash. After the employee returned to the office, he was able to give us a more exact price - somewhere around \$1000, cash only and they were closed so at least one night of storage would be added to that. Who has access to \$1000 in cash at 9:00 on a Sunday night???? I think we can safely say that Discount Towing knew that even if we were financially able to pay over \$1000, there was no way we could get there that evening with it. We were absolutely disgusted.

The next day, Jason and I had to take the morning off of work to go to the bank, get cash and go to Discount Towing. When we arrived, we were informed that our exact bill was \$1022. I had looked online and read on the DOJ website that tow companies are required to take a photo of our vehicle parked illegally. I politely asked to see the photo, another employee (not the man helping us) interjected that, "we have the photo but you need a subpoena to see it." Again, I think we can safely assume that there was no photo. I also asked about the two hours and the mileage that was charged - I was told that they hadn't written down the exact mileage or times so they simply took an "average" from this location and charged us accordingly. When I inquired about the hourly charge (\$250 per hour), the employee informed me that this is the amount they charge when called by the Oregon State Police and that they are allowed to charge us this dollar amount (even though the police were never contacted - we checked with all of them). This is when I decided that we wouldn't stand for this. We paid our money, took our vehicle and I immediately filed a consumer complaint with the DOJ.

Not too long after the complaint was filed, we were contacted by Kyle Iboshi of Channel 8 News to tell our story. As it turns out, there were many other people who had been taken advantage of by Discount Towing. We wanted as many as people as possible to hear our story. We wanted to make sure that people knew that they could file a complaint. Our complaint moved slowly with lots of excuses from Discount Towing - your complaint went to our junk mail folder, my employee didn't let me know that it hadn't been dealt with, etc. We continued to fight the battle. At one point, the owner offered to take a little over \$300 off of the bill and refund it as the video surveillance had expired and they could no longer prove that they had to use extra equipment when towing our vehicle. This was still unacceptable. They had no proof of our vehicle parked illegally. They had no exact time frame of when our vehicle was picked up and delivered to the yard (probably because it sat on the side of the freeway for some time), and they had allowed someone to access our vehicle which had damaged the seal to our window. I reached out to two other individuals who dealt with this company for guidance - we decided to stick to our guns!!

After what seemed like forever, finally in November we received this email from the owner of Discount Towing:

"Jason this is Donny. I am sorry that your case got mixed in with the others and only the offer of refund of additional services was given. there was your case and one other that was deserving of an complete refund. I thought yours had been taken care of weeks ago. once again I apologize. I have been extremely busy and thought this had been taken care of. I check has been put in the mail today."

We received our full refund but looking back, I don't believe it was enough to compensate us for the time and energy we exerted trying to come to an agreement.

Let me be clear, Jason made a mistake. He was in a hurry and parked where he should not have. I don't believe that there should be no consequence for this. However, I do believe the amount we were charged was significantly in excess of what should have been normal and customary. This amount of money reflects a huge sum for us and all because he parked in a grocery store parking lot.

We discovered many more things through this process (for example, Discount Towing was in the OSP rotation and should not have been but that's a story for a different day) but the largest and scariest lesson we learned is that there is almost no regulation governing tow companies. The owners of tow companies have access to what is a very large purchase and an absolute necessity for every family in America - our vehicles and they can do almost anything they want with that power. I know that there are many honest and reliable companies; they are doing their jobs and doing them well. But anytime you have an industry that is largely unregulated, you will have dishonest people trying to make a buck (or 1000 bucks). Nearly every other industry is subject to strict regulations where consumers are concerned, why are tow company owners allowed to act in any fashion they see fit???? We were charged \$250 an hour (they claimed it took them two hours to drive 42 miles round trip) PLUS mileage - without an exact odometer reading and a cornucopia of other charges.

I wish we could be there to discuss this but I hope in lieu of our physical presence, this letter can provide a glimpse into the importance of this issue. Please take the time to review this issue. Please take action against these dishonest companies!!

Thank you,

Aimee Hess and Jason Wolfe