

Maryland HB0198 – IN SUPPORT

My name is Jon Merryman, and I have spent thousands of hours over the past 13 years cleaning up other people's trash. Urban, suburban, and rural... from roadsides to waterways, from storm drains to farm fields – I've sought out the trash, over half a million pounds and counting, and worked with state and county Highways Departments to have the junk hauled away, then properly disposed of.

During this time, I've noted several recurring themes regarding the type of trash I find, and vehicle debris has consistently been on that list. In the past, Maryland's focus for the towing industry has been to clear the road surface of debris as quickly as possible to resume maximum traffic volumes without delay. But that leaves the job unfinished. You may not see it while your eyes are on the road, but a glance behind the guardrails of our state quickly reveal the problem this proposed legislation hopes to address.

Counties as diverse as suburban Montgomery and rural Washington County, as well as the City of Frederick, have already enacted legislation to address the issue. And I quote:

"Tow truck operators are responsible for the removal of all debris, not only from the roadway, but the entire scene itself. Debris shall not be swept to the side and left on the scene."

While members of the towing industry might claim this requirement as a hardship on their livelihoods, these are the very folks tasked with recovery after an accident, and vehicle recovery should mean the entire vehicle.

The good news is that the vast majority of auto parts are recyclable. Plastic bumper covers, one of the large parts I find most often, can be collected and melted down to create new products, saving both money and precious resources. I often find them left behind with the license plate removed, which tells me someone made the choice to leave that bumper behind.

If not them, then who? As experienced, early responders, they are in the right place, at the right time, with the right equipment to locate and remove debris after a crash. Late last year, I found a site with crash debris from SIX different vehicles, less than 30 feet from the guardrail. Over time, this debris often ends up in our creeks, rivers, wetlands, and eventually the Chesapeake itself. If not cleaned up now, our great great grandchildren will have no choice but to clean up after us.

Let's do the right thing and insist on the responsible collection of ALL vehicle debris after an accident. We cannot keep passing on these costs on to future generations. Thanks for listening.

Jon Merryman
Catonsville



I-195 in Halethorpe (Baltimore Co.): When I called the police to report debris left in the road with the plate still attached, someone showed up, removed the license plate, and left the bumper behind.



I-195 @ MD 295 (Anne Arundel Co.): The remains of SIX different vehicles were found in one spot where a recent guardrail repair was done. Pieces of the guardrail were also tossed behind the repaired guardrail after all these materials were brought to the shoulder for removal.



Race Road, Elkridge (Howard Co.). A typical scene, whether rural, suburban, or urban. The vehicle was towed away and anything not attached was swept to the shoulder, or in this case, hauled away from the scene of the accident and dumped on a secluded road.



Race Road @ Hanover Road, Hanover, Maryland (Howard Co.). If you're not yet convinced that stray auto parts are a problem, look at this State Highways property where someone involved in the vehicle recovery process chose to dispose of these bumper covers by dumping them after dark.

References:

Washington County

- Washington County Towing Handbook 01 Jul 2020 (p.13) - <https://www.washco-md.net/wp-content/uploads/es-TowBook.pdf>
- Receptacle for debris – required
- Tow truck operators are responsible for adhering to Maryland Transportation Article, Section 21-1111(c). Tow truck operators are responsible for the removal of all debris, not only from the roadway, but the entire scene itself. Debris shall not be swept to the side and left on the scene.

Montgomery County

- Code of Montgomery County Regulations: CHAPTER 30C. MOTOR VEHICLE TOWING AND IMMOBILIZATION ON PRIVATE PROPERTY — REGULATIONS
https://montgomerycountymd.gov/OCP/Resources/Files/Licensing_Forms/COMCOR%2030C.pdf
- 30C.00.02.03 (A.23.) Tow-truck drivers are responsible for the removal of debris not only from the roadway but also from the entire scene, with the exception of hazardous material. No debris will be swept to the curb by any tow-truck drivers. All tow-truck drivers will be responsible for cooperating in the clean-up process (Maryland Vehicle Law, Transportation Article § 21-1111(c)).

City of Frederick

- Frederick Police Department Towing Handbook, 2020 (p. 25) - <https://www.cityoffrederickmd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8253/TOWING-HANDBOOK>
- Tow truck operators are responsible for adhering to Maryland Transportation Article, Section 21-1111(c). Tow truck operators are responsible for the removal of all debris, not only from the roadway, but the entire scene itself. Debris shall not be swept to the side and left on the scene. Tow companies are not responsible for removal of hazardous material spills in excess of (5) gallons; such spills will be handled by a HAZMAT team.