

5 days later, couple find car that vanished

Contractor towed it; question was, where?

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By **Mark Ferencik**

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

For a Monday-night Clippers game last month, Andrew Dorr drove to his usual Downtown parking spot - Marconi Boulevard near Spring Street.

But when he and his wife, Stacey, returned to the spot at 10:15 p.m., their Nissan Maxima was gone.

The Dorr's checked the police impounding lot Tuesday to see whether it had been towed there. It hadn't.

They reported the car stolen to Columbus police and filed a claim with their insurance company. Then Mr. Dorr called 311 to see whether the city had any ideas.

An operator told him that construction companies sometimes move cars. That revelation eventually led the Dorr's to their Maxima - five days after it went missing and with two parking tickets on the windshield.

"It was such a bizarre week of not knowing what happened," Mr. Dorr said. "If it would have just been towed to the impounding lot, at least I would have known what happened to it."

Columbus has rules that are supposed to warn people not to park in construction zones, and to make sure police know what's become of cars that contractors have towed. Somehow, officials acknowledge, the system didn't work in this case.

During the Downtown resurfacing project, 200 cars have been towed, said Rick Tilton, the city's assistant public service director. On the night of that Clippers game, 21 cars were moved.

In these circumstances, the cars are not taken to the impounding lot but are moved nearby.

The pavement of Marconi Boulevard had been stripped for resurfacing, Mr. Dorr said. But no construction equipment was in the area when he parked. And none of the parking meters was bagged to show drivers they shouldn't park there, he said.

"The whole situation would have been avoided if the meters had been bagged," said Mr. Dorr, 32, an administrator with Mount Carmel Health System and a Berwick resident.

When a contractor moves a vehicle, a police officer is supposed to fill out a slip to show where the car was towed, Tilton said. It wasn't clear what went wrong here.

Kokosing was the street-resurfacing contractor working on Marconi, Tilton said, and police were present during the towing. No one is sure why the information was not relayed.

Columbus police Lt. Charles Chapman, who oversees the impounding lot, said that whoever moved Dorr's car should have notified police.

Tilton said the city's Parking Violations Bureau could find no police report that the car had been moved. Police said they had no record of it, either.

The Dorrs found their car July 31 on Marconi near W. Broad Street next to City Hall, just down the street from where it had been parked Monday.

The two parking tickets, issued on July 29 and 30, have since been dismissed, Tilton said.

Rob VanGorder, a regional manager with Kokosing, said the company's contract with the city for street resurfacing includes a provision for towing.

The company is required to post signs 72 hours before a project and to have a police officer on hand.

He and Tilton said paper signs were posted on orange cones along the street.

Mr. Dorr, who said he doesn't remember seeing the signs, wondered how his car sat for four full days in front of City Hall without being noticed. He also questioned why the city doesn't link parking-ticket and stolen-car databases.

"That blows my mind," he said.

Dispatch Assistant City Editor Mark D. Somerson contributed to this story.

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