

# **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY TAKE-HOME VEHICLE USE**

## **Clarify and Comply**

### **SUMMARY**

Santa Barbara County government currently assigns 94 vehicles to employees who are on-call while off duty. Although these vehicles represent only seven percent of the county fleet of 1,357 vehicles, they represent a significant expense and expose the county to liability.

What is the county's take-home vehicle policy and how is it monitored? The 2013-14 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury considered this question as a result of information it received indicating that the policy may not be clear. In addition, the county has not uniformly enforced its own vehicle reporting policy for about ten years. This report reviews vehicle use, oversight, and accountability. It makes recommendations that the Jury believes will result in the clarification and uniform enforcement of current take-home vehicle policy.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Jury reviewed documents concerning county policies on vehicle use, vehicle costs, and fuel consumption provided by the County Executive Office, Department of General Services and Sheriff's Office staff. Senior staff members from the Department of General Services and Sheriff's Office were also interviewed.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Jury received a complaint concerning non-compliance with existing policy and costs of operating the county's take-home vehicle fleet. The Jury was provided with three differing versions of the county policy in use by different county departments. The Jury relied upon the County Executive Office to identify the current version -- reportedly issued in 2004, but undated. This version of the policy is available to all county employees on the county's internal intranet website. The policy *County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual Administration of Vehicle Fleet*, and *Employee Use of County Vehicles* is found in Appendix A.

The ultimate authority to administer and enforce the take-home vehicle policy is vested in the County Executive Officer (CEO), referred to in the policy as the County Administrator. The, *Administration of Vehicle Fleet, Responsibility* states:

Where long-term assignments of vehicles are justified and approved by the County Administrator, department heads will ensure efficient utilization and prompt return to the County garages for scheduled

maintenance.

Where County owned vehicles are stored at, residential non-county owned locations Department heads are responsible to report the location of storage of these vehicles to the Director of General Services.<sup>1</sup>

Two separate sections of the *County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual* address the use of county-owned vehicles and long-term individual assignment. These two sections do not cross-reference each other even though both relate to residential storage and vehicle use, which creates confusion as described below.

One section is titled *Administration of Vehicle Fleet*. The sub-heading *Residential Storage Criteria* states:

Residential Storage Criteria

- a. The need to utilize a specially equipped vehicle to respond to an average to six or more after-hour emergency calls per month.
- b. The need to report directly to the field or depart very late from [sic] the field at least four days per week.
- c. Exceptions as approved by the County Administrator.

The other section is titled *Employee Use of County Vehicles*. The sub-heading *Commuting* states:

With the exception of vehicles permanently assigned to certain designated "standby status" employees (see below), policy is that County owned vehicles not be used for travel to and from work.

- Residential storage of County vehicles may be authorized only for those employees whose duties require them to be on a 24-hour "standby status" (e.g. Sheriff, Fire Chief, Emergency services personal [sic]).
- Employees who, in the normal course of their duties, do not report to a fixed location daily, (e.g., those employees who report directly to a work site away from their regular office location) may also be authorized, with their department head's permission, to keep a County vehicle overnight.

The language of these two sections provides the opportunity for different interpretations.

Furthermore, the CEO requires, through the Department of General Services, that all departments submit a form titled *Information Form Commuter or Take-Home Vehicle* for all these vehicles (Appendix B). Indeed, the policy expressly provides that the General Services Director "... will maintain information on the storage location, designated use, purchase criteria and the responsible line supervisor of each vehicle under its control."<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the Sheriff's Office, which has 65 of the 94 take-home vehicles, all other departments have complied with this policy for each assigned vehicle.

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<sup>1</sup> *County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual: Administration of Vehicle Fleet*

<sup>2</sup> *County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual: Administration of Vehicle Fleet: Maintenance of Records and Residential Storage, Item #1.*

## **OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS**

The Jury observed two major issues with the county's take-home vehicle policy. First, there is ambiguity between two major sections dealing with *Residential Storage* and *Commuting*. This provides department heads with the opportunity to apply the section of their preference.

Second, the Jury believes the overall intent of this policy is for the CEO to require that departmental assignments of take-home vehicles are properly documented. The requirement imposed upon all department heads to account for vehicle residential storage to the Director of General Services is not followed by the Sheriff's Office nor is it enforced by county administration. The Jury found that, in place of the required *Information Form*, the Sheriff's Office provided a brief email to the Director of General Services, stating only that an annual audit had been completed and it had "...determined that the goals of safety and efficiency are being met." (Appendix C). The Jury found that the Sheriff's Office has chosen not to complete the forms and neither the Director of General Services, nor the CEO has required the Sheriff's Office to do so for approximately ten years.

The Sheriff's Office does not provide documentation of actual vehicle usage in accordance with policy. It is therefore impossible for the CEO, "to review the necessity for and cost effectiveness of home storage authorization approved by the [Sheriff's Office]." <sup>3</sup> The Sheriff's Office has stated it "...is well aware of our obligation to be good stewards of the public monies entrusted to us and spends that money wisely." The Sheriff's Office cites officer safety and security as the reason for not completing and submitting the required information form because it requires the driver's name. These forms could be submitted without identifying the driver.

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2013-14 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury has determined that there has been a lack of oversight of take-home vehicles on the part of the County Executive Office as well as the Department of General Services. The Chief Executive Office has, for approximately ten years, failed to hold the Sheriff or the Director of General Services accountable for compliance with the county policy. Neither of these departments can readily identify where county vehicles assigned to the Sheriff's Office are being stored or how often those who are assigned these vehicles are called back to work.

The Sheriff's Office relies on the Commuting provision in the policy but ignores the Residential Storage Criteria provision. It believes that its practice is the safest and most efficient method for managing its vehicles. By the Jury's interpretation, the Sheriff's Office does not comply with county policy. The policy requires disclosure of take-home vehicle information by all departments. The County Executive Officer and the Director of General Services cannot fulfill their duties and responsibilities without that compliance.

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<sup>3</sup> *County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual: Administration of Vehicle Fleet*

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Finding 1**

The Santa Barbara County policy *Administration of Vehicle Fleet and Employee Use of County Vehicles* is found in two sections of the *County of Santa Barbara On-Line Policies and Procedures Manual* on the county intranet.

### **Recommendation 1**

That Santa Barbara County revise its *Administration of Vehicle Fleet and Employee Use of County Vehicles* sections into one unified policy that makes it clear that the two sections are to be applied and enforced together.

### **Finding 2**

The current Santa Barbara County policy *Administration of Vehicle Fleet and Employee Use of County Vehicles* does not contain an issue date, effective date, or any other means to identify it as the most current version.

### **Recommendation 2**

That the Santa Barbara County's *Administration of Vehicle Fleet and Employee Use of County Vehicles* policy be revised to provide an issue date or effective date to identify specifically the document as the current version.

### **Finding 3**

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office does not comply with the county policy requiring the annual reporting of take-home vehicle information.

### **Recommendation 3**

That the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office comply with the county policy requiring the annual reporting of take-home vehicles by providing the prescribed Information Form for each vehicle.

### **Finding 4**

The Santa Barbara County Executive Office has not enforced the take-home vehicle policy by failing to require the Department of General Services to obtain, and the Sheriff's Office to provide, the necessary documentation for each vehicle so assigned.

### **Recommendation 4**

That the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Office to enforce the take-home vehicle policy by requiring the Department of General Services to obtain, and the Sheriff's Office to provide, the necessary documentation for each vehicle so assigned.

### **Finding 5**

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## **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY TAKE-HOME VEHICLE USE**

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That no audit of Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office take-home vehicle usage has been conducted examining the cost and benefits of providing vehicles to employees versus other available options.

### **Recommendation 5**

That the Santa Barbara County Auditor-Controller conduct an audit of all Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office take-home vehicle usage to examine the cost and benefits of providing vehicles to employees versus other available options.

## **REQUEST FOR RESPONSE**

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933 and 933.05, the Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated findings and recommendations within the specified statutory time limit:

### **Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors – 90 days**

Findings 1, 2, 3, and 4

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4

### **Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office – 60 days**

Finding 3

Recommendation 3

### **Santa Barbara County Auditor-Controller – 60 days**

Finding 5

Recommendation 5

**APPENDIX A**

County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual  
Administration of Vehicle Fleet  
Employee Use of County Vehicles

**APPENDIX B**

Information Form Commuter or Take-Home Vehicle

**APPENDIX C**

Sheriff's Office Email Response

**APPENDIX A**

County of Santa Barbara On-line Policies and Procedures Manual  
Administration of Vehicle Fleet  
Employee Use of County Vehicles

*County of Santa Barbara On-Line Policies & Procedures Manual  
Administration of Vehicle Fleet*

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## **Policy**

It is the County's policy to provide its employees with essential transportation that is safe, reliable and economical. A motor pool will be established with an optimum number of appropriate vehicles. Long-term assignment of motor pool vehicles to departments or individuals will be made when properly justified.

## **Responsibility**

### **County Administrator**

The County Administrator will authorize the acquisition of all the new vehicles purchased by the county.

### **General Services Director**

The General Serviced Director is assigned primary responsibility for providing transportation to County employees. The Director will establish and manage county garages and will provide the following transportation-related services:

- Purchase and disposal of County vehicles
- Motor Pool operation and maintenance
- Maintenance of vehicles on approved long-term assignments and
- County fueling sites and /or commercial fueling arrangements.

### **Department Heads**

All Department heads are responsible for determining and budgeting for the transportation requirements of their departments, and for utilizing the most efficient transportation means available.



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Where long-term assignments of vehicles are justified and approved by the County Administrator, department heads will ensure efficient utilization and prompt return to the County garages for scheduled maintenance.

Where County owned vehicles are stored at residential non-county owned locations Department heads are responsible to report the location of storage of these vehicles to the Director of General Services.

## **Procedures**

### **Vehicle Acquisitions and Replacements of Assigned and Pool Vehicles**

1. Acquisition Process:
  - a. An automated application will be used to facilitate vehicle acquisitions.
  - b. The General Service Director will recommend additions to or deletions from the vehicle inventory to the County Administrator,
  - c. Department heads will advise the County Administrator of additional requirements for consideration in the annual budget.
  - d. Authorization for the acquisition of replacement vehicles will be done during the budget cycle. Except for replacements due to accident or catastrophic mechanical failure, vehicles requested outside of the budget cycle will be deemed to be new vehicle acquisition, and as such will be subject to additional analysis prior to authorization,
  - e. Departments requesting additional staff that will require an assigned vehicle to accomplish tasks should request funding for the additional vehicle(s) through the budget process and prior to the staff being hired.
2. Criteria for the Purchase and Replacement of County Vehicles
  - a. Ongoing utilization of an average of at least 1,000 miles per month.
  - b. The need for specialized vehicles to perform specific functions on a regular basis,
  - c. The need to transport specialized equipment not easily transferred between vehicles, d. Lack of an appropriate pool vehicle in a reasonably proximate location to the user.
3. Criteria for Reallocation of Assigned vehicles
  - a. The County Administrator shall from time to time review the need for continuing assignment of vehicles. When none of the above

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*Administration of Vehicle Fleet*

Criteria no longer apply, assignments will be terminated and the vehicles returned to General Services for disposition.

- b. Department heads may terminate assignments and initiate the return of Vehicles to General Services when they are no longer required to carry out the functions of their departments. (See Policy on Ownership of ISF Equipment and Associated Depreciation for more information.)
- c. The Director of General Services or his deputy will recommend to the County Administrator how best to reallocate the assigned vehicle to another fleet customer.

### **Maintenance of Records and Residential Storage**

- 1. The General Services Director will maintain information on the storage location, designated use, purchase criteria and the responsible line supervisor of each vehicle under its control.
- 2. The General Services Director will ensure that all County Vehicles are properly maintained and replaced on a timely basis.
- 3. Regular and on going residential storage on County owned vehicles by employees of the County are strongly discouraged. Assigned vehicles may be stored overnight at private residences only upon approval of the department head, based on the existence of the certain conditions.
- 4. Residential Storage Criteria
  - a. The need to utilize a specially equipped vehicle to respond to an average to six or more after-hour emergency calls per month,
  - b. The need to report directly to the field or depart very late from the field at least four days per week,
  - c. Exceptions as approved by the County Administrator
- 5. The address of storage and responsible Supervisor for all residentially stored vehicles shall be reported to the Director or General Services on an on going basis whenever the storage location changes.
- 6. Residential storage shall not be authorized for the sole purpose of providing transportation to and from work for an employee.
- 7. Vehicles should not be left on street overnight. Safe, off-street parking shall be used whenever possible.
- 8. Occasional residential storage necessitated by an early morning departure on County Business may also be authorized by the department head.
- 9. Residential storage of a vehicle is considered a taxable fringe benefit by the IRS. See policy and procedures section VI-5 for more information. Consult with the Auditor-Controller regarding current rates and procedures.
- 10. The County Administrator shall from time to time review the necessity for and cost effectiveness of home storage authorizations approved by the department heads.

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Administration of Vehicle Fleet*

## **Maintenance of Vehicles**

1. It is the responsibility of the department heads to ensure all vehicles assigned to their department are returned to the County garages for scheduled preventive maintenance.
2. Maintenance-due mileage is posted on the vehicle door or dash, and must be observed to ensure safe, reliable transportation at minimum cost. Drivers should contact the garage to schedule a maintenance appointment as the vehicle approaches the mileage established for service.
  - i. Failure to comply with maintenance turn-in procedures may result in termination of assignment.
  - ii. Departments will be notified when maintenance is complete and the vehicle is ready for pick up.
3. The need for repairs above and beyond the standard vehicle maintenance program should be reported to the County garage immediately and an appointment for service scheduled.
4. Loaners will be provided, if necessary, while vehicles are in the garage for service.
  - i. Departments will be billed for actual miles traveled in the leaner at the per mile rate for that type of vehicle.
  - ii. Failure to exchange the loaner for the regular assigned vehicle when notified by the garage that the service is complete may result in an additional charge to the department.
  - iii. The additional charge will consist of a pro rated share of the monthly fixed rate associated with the loaner, based on the excess number of days the loaner was used.
5. Motor pool vehicles receive exterior washes every two weeks and interior cleaning as often as possible.
6. Assigned vehicles may be washed twice monthly at commercial locations under contract of that service (see latest memo or contact General Services/Vehicle Operations for locations). One of the two washes per month may include interior cleaning.
7. Patrol Vehicles may receive interior/exterior cleaning once per week.
8. General Services/Vehicle Operations does not pay for waxing or detailing of county vehicles.

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Employee Use of County Vehicles*

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## **Policy**

County employees should use County vehicles for all official automotive travel and every reasonable effort should be made to do so for safety and liability coverage. County departmental heads, assistant departmental heads, Board members and Board assistants are permitted to use a private vehicle in order to reduce the number of vehicles owned and maintained by the County. Use of private vehicles by other employees should be on an exception basis only due to emergency, unavailability of County cars, and in special circumstances approved by the department head.

Certain circumstances as detailed below, may involve personal expense for employees utilizing County vehicles.

## **Responsibility**

Employees are responsible for exercising care when operating a County owned vehicle.

## **Procedure**

### **DAY USE MOTOR POOLS**

Employees who require the occasional use of a vehicle in connection with their work may obtain one from a Day Use Motor Pool. Completion of a Motor Pool Requisition, including driver's license number and certification that a valid License in the employee's possession, along with complete and accurate departmental billing information, is required at the time of check-out.

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During a normal working day, vehicles may be checked out and returned at County Motor Pools on a first-come basis. Dispatchers will also accept advance reservations, which are recommended but not required.

Overnight or extended trip use of out-of-county travel requires advance reservations through the dispatcher.

To ensure maximum utilization (and minimum cost) employees should not check out vehicles until actually required. They will return vehicles to Motor Pool immediately upon completion of need. Shared vehicles will be used whenever feasible.

### **Traffic Violations and other Fines and Penalties**

Fines and Penalties levied for violation of state, County or city laws and ordinances for which the driver is responsible shall be paid by the driver.

### **Accidents**

All accidents are to be reported to the local law enforcement agency or California Highway Patrol immediately, and a County Accident report form is to be completed and submitted to General Services/Risk Management no later than the next working day. If no accident report form is in the vehicle glove box, contact Risk Management or Vehicle Operations to obtain one.

### **For County Business Only**

A vehicle owned or maintained for the use of service of the County shall not be used for any purpose other than county business by a County official or employee. All passengers in County vehicles must also be engaged in the conduct of official business. Volunteers, interns, and other non-employees may be authorized by the department head to utilize County vehicles on an occasional basis to conduct County business by issuing a requisition for pool car use after first determining that the individual has a valid California driver's license.

### **Drivers License**

Any driver of a County vehicle must be in possession of the proper valid California driver's license.

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### **Observe Traffic Rules**

Employees on County business will observe all traffic rules, regulations, and courtesies at all times. Fines or penalties levied for violations for which the driver is directly responsible shall be paid by the driver.

### **Report Violations**

Employees are to immediately report to their department head any and all violations of the Motor Vehicle Code that occur when operating a County vehicle or a personal vehicle on County business. The department head will then report the violation to General Services Administration. Reports shall be made on all violations and infractions, including those related to the vehicle (repairs required), whether or not a citation was issued by a law enforcement agency. Conversely, General Service Administration will inform department heads of any vehicle abuse or violation involving their employees.

### **Seat Belts**

It is state law that all drivers and passengers utilize belts.

### **Abuse of Vehicles**

County Vehicles, other than those specified for such purposes, shall not push stalled vehicles, be driven off-road, or be used in a manner that may damage the vehicle.

### **Personal Liability**

Employees may be held personally liable for damage to County equipment, in addition to other penalties that may be assessed, if through negligence or in the course of illegal activities, damage occurs to a County Vehicle.

Employees may be held personally liable when they are outside of the course and scope of their employment and cause damage to other persons or property while driving a County Vehicle.

### **Eating/Smoking in Vehicle**

Eating, drinking and smoking is prohibited in Motor Pool and Assigned vehicles in order to minimize interior wear and tear, maximize vehicle life and comply with the County's smoking policies.

### **Personal Property in Vehicle**

of personal property to a County vehicles, such as radios, decals, The attachment bumper stickers. Ect... is prohibited.

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## **Vehicle Keys**

Keys will not be left in unattended vehicles, even when parked in secured areas.

## **Commuting**

With the exception of vehicles permanently assigned to certain designated "standby status" employees (see below), policy is that County owned vehicles not be used for travel to and from work.

- Residential storage of County vehicles may be authorized only for those employees whose duties require them to be on a 24 hour "standby status" (e.g., Sheriff, Fire Chief, Emergency services personal).
- Employees who, in the normal course of their duties, do not report to a fixed location daily, (e.g., those employees who report directly to a work site away from their regular office location) may also be authorized, with their department head's permission, to keep a County vehicle overnight.
- For those vehicles authorized for residential storage, (except those in a "standby status"), total mileage, total business mileage, and total personal (including commute) mileage must be reported to the Auditor-Controller disbursement division monthly, for inclusion, where appropriate, in the employee's taxable income computation.

## **Use of Fueling Facilities**

Department shall include information in their new employee orientations regarding safe and proper use of County fuel facilities, including the policies and procedures set fourth here. All departmental employees who drive County vehicles should from time to time be reminded of the necessary for fuel facility safety.

Employees who have questions or require assistance in operating the County's fuel facilities should contact the garage staff at the site during regular business hours for information or instruction.

Employees who observe damage, problems or anything unusual when using County fuel facilities must immediately notify either garage personnel on-site or, if after regular hours, phone the emergency number posted at the facility. In either case, detailed information should be provided regarding the location and nature of the problem.

Employees who cause damage to County fuel facilities must immediately notify either garage personnel on-site or phone the emergency number posted at the facility. Detailed information must be provided regarding the location and nature of the problem Damage may be underground or otherwise not immediately apparent.

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***Employee Use of County Vehicles***

A report shall be made whenever the possibility of damage exists. When damage occurs a County Accident Report form (GSD/RM-56) must be completed and filed with Risk Management.

In the case of unreported damage to County fuel facilities, Vehicle Operations will utilize data stored in the automated fuel system to determine responsibility for the incident.

Once responsibility for damage has been determined, the employee's department head will be notified in writing of the incident. Billing for reimbursement of repair/replacement costs will be accomplished by the addition of a miscellaneous charge to the vehicle journal voucher processed following receipt of all related invoices.

When appropriate, Vehicle Operations will advise the concerned regulatory agency(ies) of the incident and the name and department of the employee responsible.



**APPENDIX B**

Information Form Commuter or Take-Home Vehicle

## **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY TAKE-HOME VEHICLE USE**

### **INFORMATION FORM**

#### **Commuter or Take Home Vehicle**



Please mark the Category and complete one form for each Take Home or Commuter Vehicle within your Department. Take Home or Commuter Vehicles fall within one of three categories.

- ☐ **Category #1 Contract:** Employees that are entitled to take a vehicle home as part of their contractual benefit package.
- ☐ **Category #2 Stand-By:** Employees whose duties require them to be on a 24-hour "stand-by" status.
- ☐ **Category #3 Work Location:** Employees who, in the normal course of their duties do not report to a fixed work location, but are required to report to varying or remote locations.

Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Budget Unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee "Driver" Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

County Vehicle Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Make and Model: \_\_\_\_\_

If vehicle contains specialized equipment, please summarize: \_\_\_\_\_

How many days per week is the vehicle used for commuting: \_\_\_\_\_

Travel is from \_\_\_\_\_ (Area of Residence)

to \_\_\_\_\_ (Work Location) One-Way commute mileage \_\_\_\_\_

Where is vehicle parked overnight? ☐ Street ☐ Driveway ☐ Garage

If not driven home, where would vehicle be parked? \_\_\_\_\_

Business reasons for Take Home Vehicle:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of off-hour call-out emergencies employee has responded to in the past twelve months (Category #2 only): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Authorizing Signatures**

Employee (Driver): \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Immediate Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Department Director: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**

Sheriff's Office Email Response

**Peterson, James**

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**From:** Peterson, James  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 27, 2013 9:05 AM  
**To:** Pontes, Matthew  
**Subject:** Vehicle Survey

*Mr. Pontes,*

*In accordance with the memo regarding the Take Home Vehicle Survey, I have completed our annual audit. The Sheriff's Office has identified 70 vehicles that are considered "take home vehicles" and approved as such by the Sheriff. Each of these vehicles are assigned to members of the department who are called upon to respond to exigent circumstances with specialized emergency equipment at any given time, either on or off-duty. The management of the Sheriff's Office has reviewed the vehicle usage and has determined that the goals of safety and efficiency are being met.*

*If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at 805-681-4288.*

*Jim Peterson, Undersheriff  
Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office  
805-681-4288  
[icv0373@sbsfteriff.org](mailto:icv0373@sbsfteriff.org)*