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From the Los Angeles Times

L.A. police to resume impounding vehicles today

Bratton's decision covers cars belonging to people without valid driver's licenses

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The Los Angeles Police Department will end its self-imposed moratorium on impounding the vehicles of unlicensed drivers today and does not need the Police Commission's approval to resume the practice, Police Chief William J. Bratton said Tuesday.

Bratton had said last week that the moratorium would remain in effect until next Tuesday, when he would ask for minor changes to the department's policy relating to the ability of officers to impound vehicles for 30 days, as state law allows. The practice has long been a contentious issue in debates over illegal immigration.

But the chief said that after reviewing the issue, he determined that the minor "clarifications" he wanted did not amount to a policy change and that he could order the impounds to resume immediately.

"These are clarifications of an existing policy," he said. "We are asking our officers to use common sense. We want all our officers on one page."

A lawyer who sued Los Angeles and several other cities in federal court last March over their towing practices said she would seek an injunction to curtail the impounds.

By not taking the issue to the Police Commission, Bratton avoided a potential City Council review of the commission's vote on the policy.

Such a review could have unleashed a battle at City Hall over what has long been a political hot-button issue, because many unlicensed drivers are illegal immigrants who cannot get driver's licenses.

In June, City Councilman Jose Huizar introduced a motion calling on the LAPD and the city attorney's office to determine the effect on the Los Angeles policy of a U. S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in a case involving an unlicensed driver in Oregon.

In that case, the court concluded that such impounds violate constitutional protections against unreasonable seizure.

Police Commission member Alan Skobin said Bratton was within his rights in resuming the impounds.

"He was not proposing to change the policy, and he just wants to resume the impounds with some clarity," Skobin said.

For years, immigrant rights groups and some state lawmakers have sought legislation granting illegal immigrants a form of driver's licenses, but the bills have been

rejected.

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