

Nothing personal, it's just efficiency

Top 5 excuses for not paying parking tickets

When it comes to people trying to get out of parking tickets, Rapid City officials have heard it all. Here are some favorite excuses — and the response you're likely to hear from city staff:

■ "The meter didn't give me all my time."

(Response: Call 394-6098 immediately so city staff can check the meter. If the meter timer is off, they'll waive your ticket.)

■ "But I moved my car into a different space after two hours."

(Response: City ordinance limits two-hour parking to two hours per block face. You must move your vehicle off a particular block for at least 30 minutes before your two hours start over.)

■ "My appointment took longer than I expected."

(Response: Put in an extra quarter next time.)

■ "I didn't see the sign."

(Response: Look.)

■ "It was five minutes to 5 p.m., and they stop reading meters at 5."

(Response: Those are some efficient parking enforcement officers.)



Journal photo/Don Polovich

Rapid City parking enforcement officer Jennifer Fry writes a parking ticket during her morning rounds of Rapid City's downtown area.

Rapid City parking enforcement officers don't lie in wait for you

Editor's note: Overpark in downtown Rapid City and you KNOW you're going to get a ticket.

City parking enforcement officers are extremely efficient, as anyone who has ever been caught when they "just ran inside for a minute" can tell you. But contrary to popular belief, parking officers don't lie in wait for you, specifically. They're too busy.

Today's story, the last in a series on the downtown parking situation, looks at what it's like to be on the giving end of the ticket, rather than the receiving end.

By Heidi Bell
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Stretch out.

That's my advice for anyone who spends an afternoon with parking enforcement officer Jennifer Fry, a petite, blond woman who walks at roughly the speed of light.

At least that's what two-hour shufflers — downtown employees who move their cars regularly to take advantage of free two-hour parking — believe. Like Santa Claus, parking officers seem to be everywhere at once, and

they know if you're naughty (that is, over-parked) or nice.

"They walk around my car all day," swears one Rapid City Journal employee who claims parking officers lie in wait for him, ready to pounce when he's slow to shuffle.

As an occasional shuffler myself, I admit I felt the same way. I expected Fry to gleefully delight in writing tickets, chalking the tires of* still-occupied vehicles and finding the same car she ticketed yesterday parked at an empty meter.

Nope. Sorry to quash you shufflers' delusions of grandeur, but Fry doesn't have it in for you personally. Like the city's three other parking officers (are there only FOUR?), she's just very efficient.

To make things worse, she's so nice that even the people Fry tickets can't argue with her much.

"Once in a while, you'll run across somebody that gets a little irate, but really that doesn't happen too often," Fry said as she set off on her rounds.

After about 45 minutes of racing through downtown, my hamstrings were screaming. Imagine my chagrin to find we were only halfway through the route — and that this was Fry's THIRD TIME around that day.

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Parking: Can write a ticket in 10 seconds

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After 10 years, Fry has parking enforcement down to an art. She wears comfortable, black Air Nikes (one pair lasts about three months), tucks her pen inside her glove (so the ink will flow when the temperature drops) and carries a digital clock to make sure no one gets ticketed early ("We're quite meticulous").

She can chalk tires at a brisk pace and spot expired meters from yards away. Then she can write a ticket in 10 seconds flat, at the same time making sure the vehicle isn't on her list of unpaid tickets.

"I have an endless supply of parking tickets," Fry said cheerfully.

And the chalk? "It's good for all weather conditions, much to some people's dismay."

Along with checking cars in the timed and metered zones, parking officers — who are nonsworn officers in the Rapid City Police Department — also repair parking meters, check city leased lots for proper parking tags, make sure alleys and loading zones stay clear, and occasionally help write accident reports.

They patrol from Second Street to West Boulevard and from Omaha Street to Columbus Street. In one day, Fry can write up to 147 tickets and walk up to 15 miles ("When I get

How city's parking fines stack up

■ **Rapid City:** \$5 for overparking in two-hour zone or expired meter. Fine doubles to \$10 if not paid in 72 hours. Notices of unpaid tickets are sent to offenders. When you have five unpaid tickets, officers will put a bright-colored sticker on your car window, warning that you have 72 hours to pay your bill. If you don't pay up, your car will be immobilized. Then, you pay \$50 plus the unpaid tickets to get the boot removed.

■ **Sioux Falls:** \$3 for overparking in time zones or expired meter. Fine goes to \$12 if not paid in 72 hours. If you don't pay your tickets, a warrant is issued for your arrest.

■ **Cheyenne, Wyo.:** \$5 for overparking in two-hour zone, \$2 for meter violation. Fine goes up \$1 if not paid in 10 working days. Late notices are sent out if you don't pay. If you have three or more tickets and owe \$21 or more, your car is booted. Cost is \$25 plus unpaid tickets to have boot removed.

■ **Casper, Wyo.:** \$5 for overparking in time or meter zones. If you don't pay your tickets, you get a court summons and/or a warrant issued for your arrest.

■ **Billings, Mont.:** \$5 for overtime parking, \$2 for expired meter. If you have 10 or more unpaid tickets, your car is booted. Cost is \$50 plus unpaid tickets to get boot removed.

home, I go to the couch").

She likes the variety, the physical exercise and being outdoors. "When it's beautiful outside, I have people wanting to trade jobs with me."

Not every day is nice, of course. "Wind can ruin a perfectly beautiful day," Fry said. If it's really nasty, they work inside. "But I would say we're out there probably 97 percent of the

time, in all weather conditions."

No wonder she walks so fast.

Over 10 years, Fry has seen downtown grow. But she thinks there is more parking available than people realize, if they're just willing to walk a block or two.

You shufflers may be surprised at this, too, but Fry doesn't really care if you shuffle. As long as you follow the

rules and move your car off the block face for 30 minutes, she's happy.

"It's not to be strict on people or unreasonable," Fry said. "The idea is to be fair."

That's why parking officers don't issue tickets to cars at funerals and why they give out-of-state cars extra parking time during tourist season.

Fairness is also why city officials raised overtime parking fines from \$2 to \$5 last year: to keep employees from parking on the street so there is room for shoppers.

Apparently, it's working. Community Development Director Bonnie Hughes said the number of parking tickets is down, although revenue is 3 percent more than projected.

Speaking of fair, Fry says wiping chalk marks off your tires isn't. But it is amusing when she catches someone in the act.

"They get embarrassed," she said with a big grin. "Usually, it's pretty obvious, too. It's this big clean mark with a smudge of orange in it."

She's been embarrassed herself a time or two when she's set off a car's burglar alarm by chalking its tires.

But Fry has never been embarrassed by having her own car immobilized. Believe it or not, she's never even gotten a parking ticket.

"I'm really careful," she said. "I plug that meter."