

Parking fines triple for handicap spaces

Advocates say some still ignorant of rules

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If you've ever pulled into a handicap space thinking "I'll just be a minute," you may want to think twice before trying that again.

A state law that went into effect this spring triples the fines associated with handicap parking violations, bringing the mandatory penalty from \$50 to between \$150 and \$300.

The fine applies to anyone without a properly displayed permit who parks in or blocks a handicap spot or an unloading zone for wheelchair-accessible vans.

"People get mad when they get turned in and they blame us or the cops," said Steve Pribbenow, director of the Sauk County Disabled Parking Enforcement Assistance Council. "What they need to realize is that no one forced them to park in a particular manner, nor did we force them to not follow the rules. If anybody's to blame, it's them."

Pribbenow said there continues to be some confusion about the rules involving handicap spaces.

Many people don't realize, he said, that the spaces with diagonal lines attached to regular handicap spaces provide wheelchair acces-

sible vans with just enough room to extend a ramp that a disabled person can wheel down and into the parking lot.

If a vehicle encroaches even slightly on an unloading space, it limits the room a person in a wheelchair has to wheel off the ramp.

Pribbenow said some people who have legitimate handicap permits don't display or use them properly. A handicap space may only be used if the person who possesses the permit intends to leave the vehicle.

Too often, Pribbenow said, drivers park in a handicap space and run into a store while their disabled passenger sits in the vehicle waiting for them.

"They are issued to single individuals," he said. "The law requires the owner of a disabled permit to be in the vehicle when it pulls into the stall and at minimum the disabled sticker owner has to leave the vehicle. The intent is so the disabled person can be closest. ... The non-disabled driver doesn't need that proximity."

Another state law that recently went into effect allows municipalities to appoint non-police officers to enforce handicap parking laws.

The appointed individuals would have the authority to write citations.