How To – Automated Certified Electronic Mail

"*How to avoid incorrect owner and lienholder mailing addresses"*

Back in 2010, VTS Systems collaborated with Auto Data Direct Inc. (ADD) to offer its management software customers fully automated electronic certified mail, return receipt requested, known as Direct Post Office (DPO) along with online, multistate DMV access, for owner and lienholder records. Since 2010, VTS Systems customers have processed more than 1.9 million notification lien/letters via this automated process, and if the VTS operator follows the correct procedure, this simple automated mail system operates flawlessly. Automated systems reduce the cost, time, and the effort it takes to achieve a given result; however, this does not absolve the operator of the responsibility of focusing on the task, to achieve the required result.

In any business, Standard Operating Procedure, (SOP) is vital to efficiency, ongoing success, and profitability. However, employees come and go every so often VTS Systems receives a call from a tow company, or VSF owner complaining that his/her automated letter process has gone haywire and the automated system is sending multiple letters to vehicle owners who have no history with the vehicle or no letters at all, and they want to know why?

Over the last eight years, VTS Systems/ADD have processed millions of letters, and in every reported incident involving notification/lien letter errors, after VTS Systems reviewed the tracking meta data, the cause comes down to operator error. Software either works or it does not, there are no software variables! Obviously, there are variables, and sadly, it is the human error factor. Working as a tow dispatcher or a VSF operative, is without doubt a challenging pressure cooker occupation. Moreover, it is fair to say that VSF operators do not purposely set out to make mistakes, but mistakes happen.

Every state or province has its own rules regarding notification dates and whether or not the VSF must send one or more notification/lien letters. When VTS Systems installed your software and during initial training sessions, a VTS Systems employee programmed your specific state notification schedule into your company's computer network and software application. Below we will explain the simple systematic process, which <u>MUST</u> begin with a confirmed VIN. Although every state has different notification dates, they all follow the same DMV protocols, and must comply with the USPS electronic certified mail guidelines. To simplify the process, we will use the notification/lien letter process as it applied to the state of Texas prior to June 15, 2017.

Some form of Standard Operating Procedure, (SOP) a simple, systematic process must be in place to ensure notification/lien letters are sent to the correct owner(s) and or lienholder(s) in a timely manner; NOT mailed incorrectly, to persons whom have no interest or knowledge of the impounded vehicle.

For the purposes of this document, we will assume that the tow truck driver/operator works for the same company that owns and operates the VSF and that they are familiar with the VTS Systems software management application.

Step 1 - Obtaining the Correct Owner and Lienholder

When receiving an impounded vehicle, the VSF operator must convert the VTS dispatch or tow record into a storage lot record, this normal SOP moves the entered dispatch, and or towing data into the storage lot record. Once converted into a storage lot record, the VSF operator should immediately check the correctness of the vehicle data. This MUST include the VIN, the TAG, or plate information, followed by make, model of the vehicle impounded.

Fortunately, most tow truck operators are gifted with the mechanical gene, and good at what they do. Sadly however, many did not inherit the handwriting gene, and would not win a handwriting competition. This frequently results in a misinterpretation when others read the handwritten VIN. [Two's (2) are often read as Z and fives (5) read as S, etc.]

Note: a VIN containing 17 digits including numbers and letters is difficult to record accurately 100% of the time. Add to this rain, snow, cold, heat, useless pens, and wet paper. Therefore, it is very important that if the original VIN was handwritten, that a second person verify the VIN before processing the MVR.

A Working Solution… have your drivers use their smart phones to photograph the VIN and send this as an SMS text message attachment to the VSF dispatcher/operator; this will eliminate 95% of VIN errors.

Step 2 - The Critical Importance of Correct Data

It is important to verify all entered vehicle data as correct, before any DMV search is processed. If backdating tow tickets entries left over from the previous day or weekend tow or impoundments, make sure that **ALL** date and time references match those on the tow ticket **before** proceeding to run an MVR. **Note: Changing tow and VSF impound dates and or times AFTER running the MVR will corrupt the auto letter mailing process, resulting in failed or date conflicted letter mailings.** In normal daily operations, the VTS app is a real-time management application, therefore dates and times update automatically.

In the lower third of the Storage Lot Record window is the MVR button. Clicking the MVR button will open a sub-window, presenting a red MVR telephone image. It is an Auto Data Direct, and more importantly a federal requirement under the Driver's Privacy Protection Act, 1994 (DPPA) that each VSF operator having access to DMV data MUST have their own secure username and password. In simple terms, DO NOT LOG ONTO ADD123.COM, USING ANOTHER PERSON'S USER NAME AND PASSWORD. Failure to comply with this
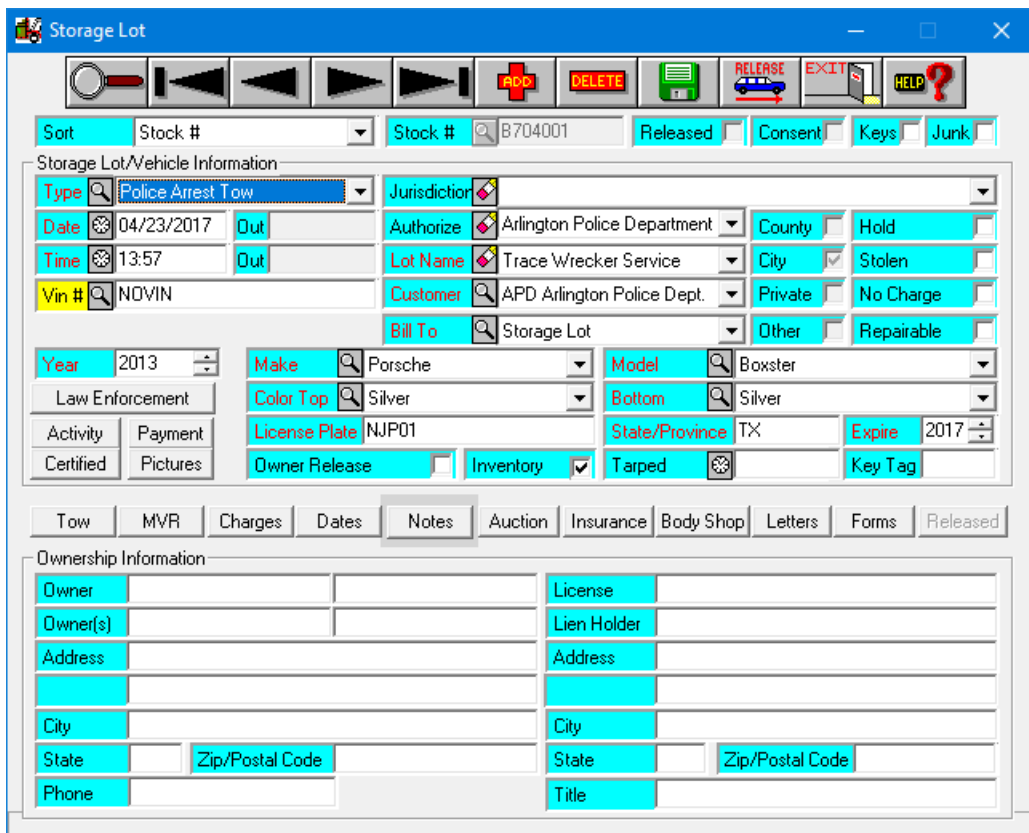
federal law and Auto Data Direct (ADD) requirement may result in federal and or state prosecution and if discovered, the loss of your company's access to ADD's service.

However, providing the operator's username and passwords are current in both the VTS app, and their respective ADD Log-In, clicking the MVR telephone image will begin the process of obtaining the vehicle owner(s) and lienholder(s) information via the ADD portal.

The MVR process requires three (3) pieces of information:

- A confirmed 17-digit VIN (if the operator enters more or less than 17 digits, the VTS app will flag the entry as an error, turning the turquoise blue Vin # box yellow.) If no VIN is available, then enter the word "NOVIN".

- A TAG or a license plate number, indicating the state of issue (TX, etc.) if no TAG information is available, leave the default TXPATE or delete data and leave empty.

- An estimated year of manufacture or when first registered, it is also beneficial to have entered into VTS the vehicle, make, and model.

Image 01 - if a 17 digit VIN is entered, the VIN box will remain turquoise

If your state DMV provides "Raw Data", the VTS app will automatically compare the entered VIN, the TAG or plate and the year of registration, against the MVR "Raw Data" downloaded from the state of record. If the state of record provides "Raw Data", it is an excellent opportunity and **(HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)** that the VSF operator review and confirm that the impounded vehicle data matches exactly to the DMV/MVR data.
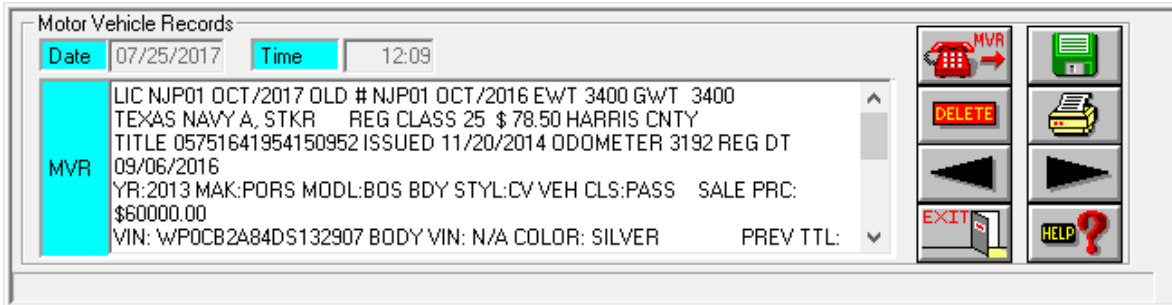

Image 02   Texas DMV/MVR Raw Data, often refered to by LEA's as a 10/28

If the state of record does **NOT** provide "Raw Data", the state DMV will only download the owner(s) and lienholder(s) name and address. *Non-availability of DMV "Raw Data" generally implies a restriction of information due to state privacy laws.* If the state of record does not supply "Raw Data", the VTS app will display the words "No Raw Data". In this instance, the VSF operator should opt to print a hard copy. The hard copy image is the same as Image 06, but without the "Raw data" content.

If the VSF operator failed to confirm the VIN as belonging to the impounded vehicle or entered an incorrect state of record, or unknowingly, transposed two of the 17 digits then two things will happen:

- If the incorrect VIN is identified as a vehicle registered in that state, the state DMV will deliver owner(s) and lienholder(s) information associated with that VIN. Further, if the state of record does not provide "Raw Data" for a VSF operator to comparison check, there is no way for the VSF to verify the legal owner(s) or lienholder(s). (INCORRECT VIN, EQUALS INCORRECT OWNER, AND LIENHOLDER INFORMATION.)

- If the incorrect VIN is not identified as a vehicle registered in that state, then the VTS app will present a window "VIN – Not Found" (Image 03).

The window reporting **"VIN Not Found"** offers the VSF operator a choice of proceeding by a license plate "YES/NO." VTS Systems **strongly recommends** that **unless** you are operating under a NOVIN situation and searching by TAG or plate that you immediately **cease/stop the MVR process** and re-check the VIN against the impounded vehicle, once corrected; begin the DMV/MVR process again.
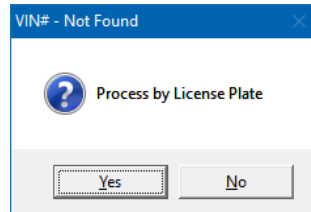
Image 03

if a VIN number is obtained from the impounded vehicle, but there are no plates referencing the state of origin, then the VSF operator should log on to their personal ADD 123 account and locate the **"National Title Pointer" MNVTIS** to obtain the state in which the vehicle was last registered. The cost for this service is $2.50, saving hours of unnecessary research. However, if the VSF operator is unable to locate a VIN on the impounded vehicle, (Example: a home-built trailer) then enter NOVIN into the VIN box. Providing the VSF operator understands the reason for the yellow marker, then he/she, may proceed with caution. Home built trailers, or trailers without a VIN, present numerous problems. If your law enforcement does not have a "stolen or specialty vehicle division, contact your regional DMV office for assistance on how to proceed.

If no VIN can be identified as belonging to the impounded vehicle, and the VSF operator elects to continue the DMV process using the vehicle or TAG or license plate, (if available) VTS app will present a **"Update VIN"** window displaying what VIN "was" entered by the VSF operator, versus what the DMV returned, "now is". Again, it is critically **IMPORTANT** to compare the two and understand how and why the error occurred.
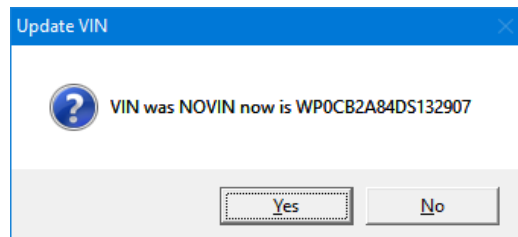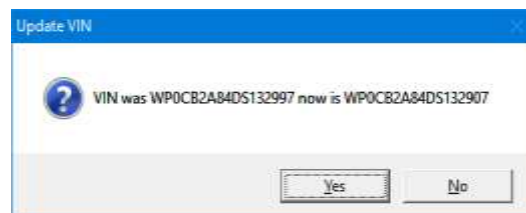

Image 04a

Image 04b

In the example shown above (Image 04b) the VSF operator entered one of the VIN digits incorrectly. (Example, 97 instead of 07.) Once the VSF operator has READ AND VERIFIED and understands how the error occurred and accepts the VTS app offered correction YES/NO, the VTS app will continue to compare

data entered by the VSF operator, versus what is returned/downloaded from the DMV, and offer a comparison YES/NO solution. If the data entered or updated is an exact match for the DMV record, then the VTS app will present Image 05. Print Inventory Sheet, this is a YES/NO option, printing a hardcopy record of all of the acquired data for the impounded vehicle.
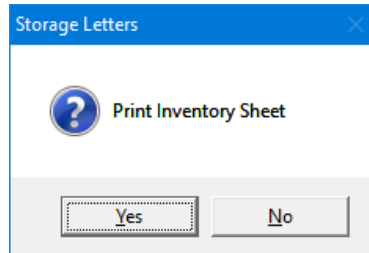

Image 05

In addition, the VTS app will break-up the owner(s) and lienholder(s) information, placing it in the correct name and address lines within the application. (Christian or given names on the left, and surnames on the right.) Both name boxes must contain information or the mailing will fail. (See Image 06) in addition, there are two letter-processing icons, which illuminate **Green** or **Red.**

Green indicates that a letter was created and pushed as a cyber document to DPO, were it will be collected daily by the USPS or its agent for processing and entry into the USPS mail stream.

If there are processing errors, the VTS/DPO app will force the letter into the error file, which will illuminate **Red**.

(**Green** is good, **Red** is bad.)

Open the **Red** DPO error file to view, each failed letter, this will identify why the letter failed. Clicking on the letter line item will allow the operator the make the required changes and re-push the corrected letter the USPS for processing. If the corrections were successful, the letter will move into the **Green** file and the **Red** error icon will return to its normal grey color.

Sample processing errors **Red** may include the follows:

- Insufficient mailing funds

- Data pushed to a second page

- An address line exceeding USPS limitation of 40 characters, etc.

In addition, the VTS app will also identify other mailing errors.

Moreover, if you refer back to Image 02, you will notice that there is a print icon on the right side of the screen. Clicking on the print icon will produce an on-screen/printable image verifying that the DMV data was obtained legally, in real-time, via third party vendor from the state of record.

Note: Most state DMV's or local Tax Offices will NOT accept VIN data from a "Store and Forward" data base, only from a state supplied "Real-Time" data base. The VTS/ADD process uses only "Real-Time" data. What is a "Store and Forward" data base? It is VIN and ownership records that are uploaded and stored on a third-party server, for later sale to an end user. The state rational behind the rejection is VIN and vehicle records, including "stolen" data are subject to constant change, "Store and Forward data cannot track these changes.
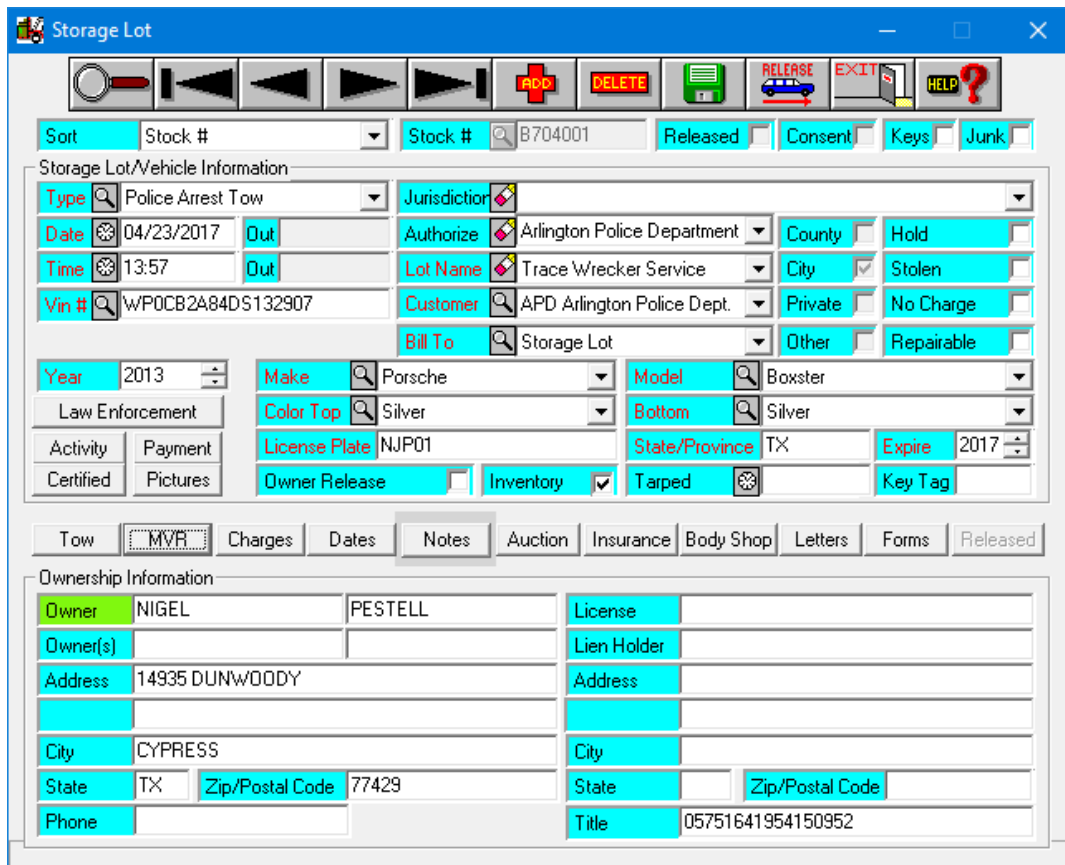
Image 06 – ADD / Texas Vehicle Record

Step 3 - A USPS Deliverable Address

Returning to the Storage Lot window, shows the screenshot updated to include owner(s) and lienholder(s) information. If there is no lienholder registered, the space remains unfilled. If more than one owner or

lienholder address is provided by the state DMV, then the Owner and or Lienholder button is flagged **"Lime Green"** (See Image 06)

Image 06

The VSF operator should READ AND VERIFY the name and mailing address presented in the ownership information window. Failure to verify a name and deliverable mailing address may cause the Local Tax Assessor to reject a title transfer or the state DMV to decline a COA to crush the vehicle.

If the Owner or Lienholder information window contains a **"Lime Green"** flagged button, this indicates multiple owners and lienholders, not all may require a notification letter. By clicking the **"Certified"** button, above the **"Lime Green"** marker, will open the certified mailing list for review.

In the sample below (Image 07), you will discover a common DMV type duplication. When selling the vehicle in 2014, the salesperson did not record the full name and address of the new owner. Later, the new owner obtained a customized plate and when registering this on-line with the DMV, the new owner correctly entered his full name and address. On review, you will notice that the first and second owner records are for the same

person, yet the first owner record is missing a middle name, and the address is missing the word Bend. The salesperson either failed to concentrate on the task, was lazy and inattentive, probably both! Moreover, it is obvious that the first and second entry is the same person; therefore, the VSF operator should move to delete the second owner line item and save the cost of two additional letters. ($6.80 x 2 = $13.60 / USPS increased fees 11cents 01/01/2018). In addition, you will notice that Image 06 has no registered lienholder information, indicating there is no finance lien on the vehicle. Hence, the space is blank.
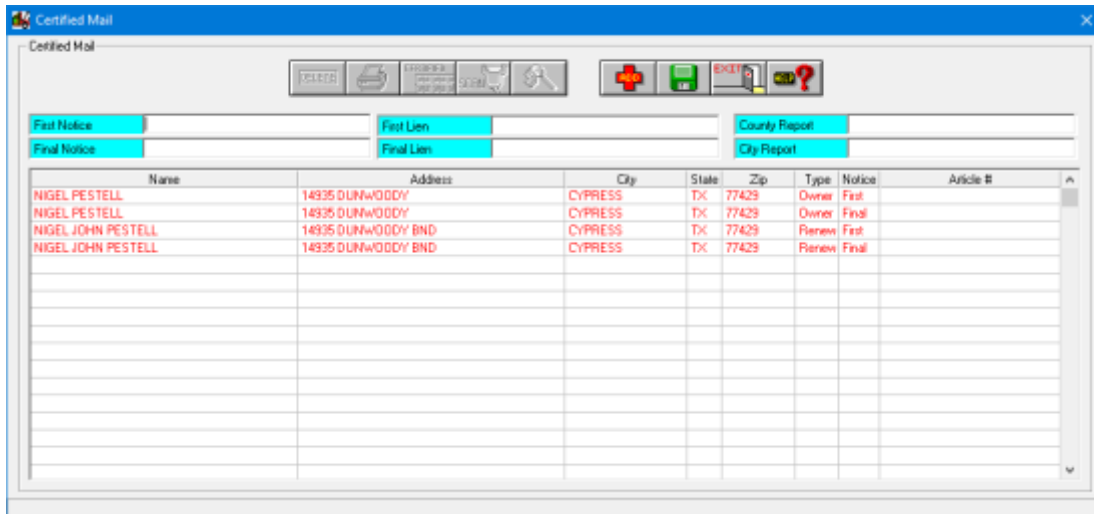

Image 07a

Step 4 - The Final Cleanup

By **double-clicking** on the second (duplicate) notification name will open up an additional window, allowing the operator to delete the second owner/address. (See Image 07b and Image 08.)
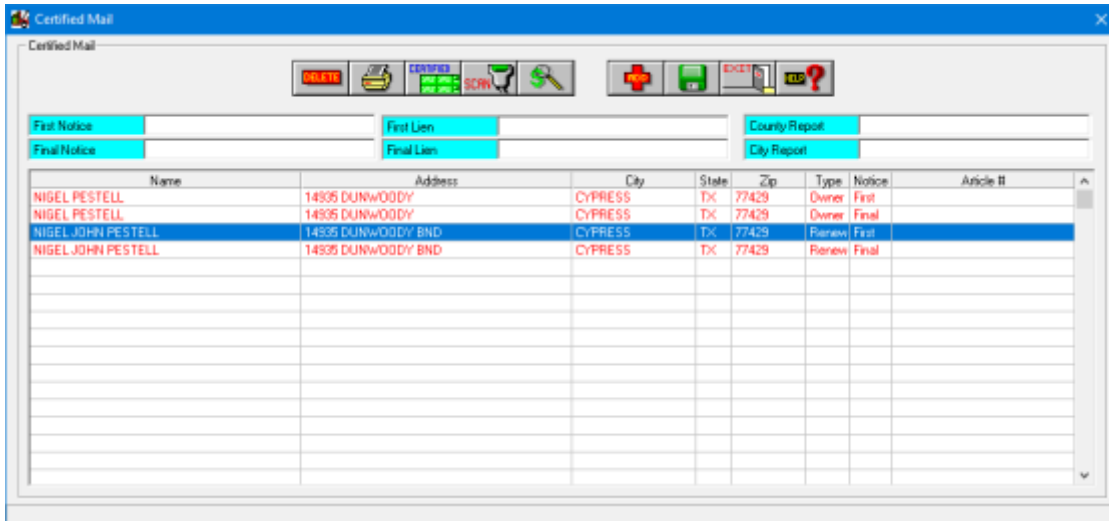
Image 07b

Image 08

In the Alternate Owner Window, Clicking the DELETE icon button will provide a YES/NO choice to remove the alternate owner. (Image 09)
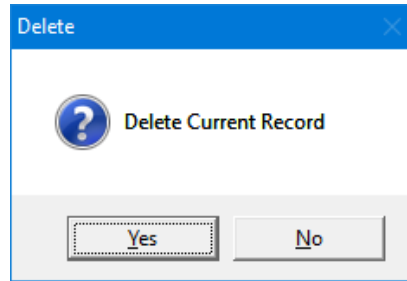
Image 09

Note: if the alternate owner/renewal address is different from the primary owner name and address, then your state regulator may require that you send notification/lien letters to both persons. In this example, it is obvious that they are one and the same person, at the same address requiring the VSF operator to make the YES/NO decision.
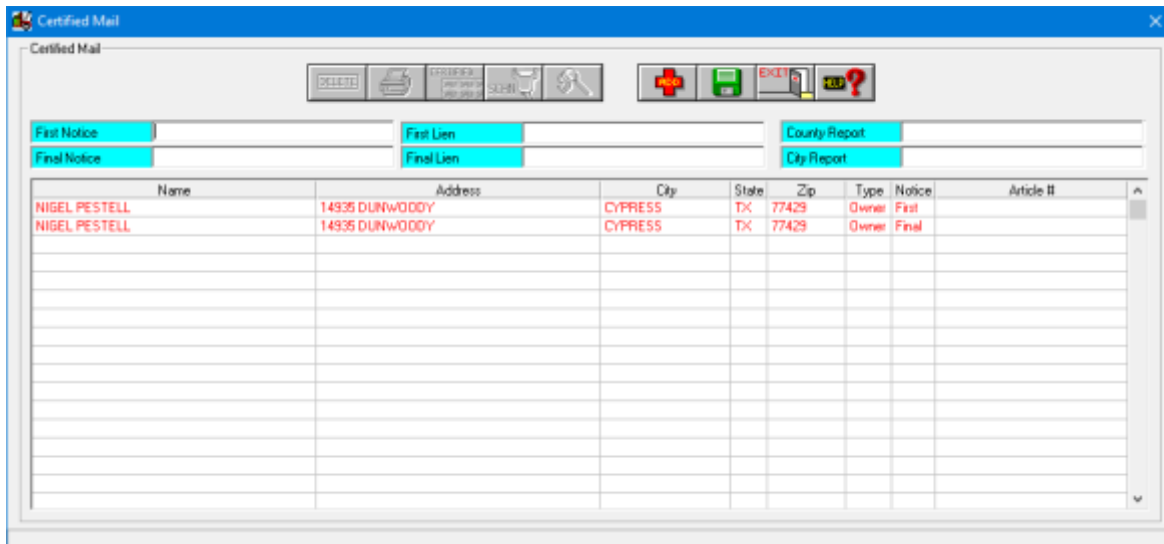
(Image 10)

In Image 10, you will see that alternate owner's were deleted, and only the registered owner is scheduled to receive a notification/lien letter. If the VSF is located in the state of Texas, then the first notification letter must be mailed before the fifth (5) business day following impoundment, but under no circumstances before 24 hours have passed following vehicle impound. The VTS app automatically keeps the VSF operator on schedule by illuminating the letter icon, on the right hand side of the Ready Screen.

As of June 15th. 2017, Texas no longer requires proof of USPS delivery of a notification/lien letter. All that is required is proof of mailing. Proof of mailing is automatically returned and the data entered into the storage lot record/certification as Firm Book 3877. Highlighting a line item will illuminate the icons above, clicking the desired icon will produce a screenshot of the page, which can then be printed.

When the Red Letter icon illuminates, it is an indication that the VSF operator must take action.
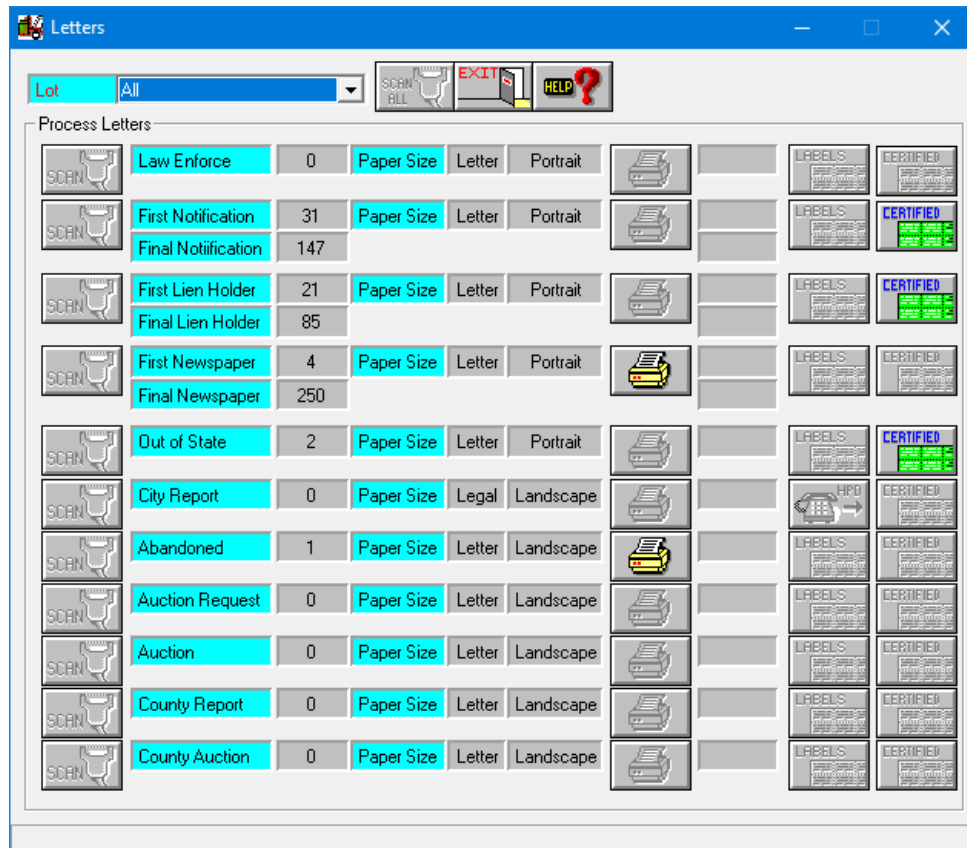
Image 11 Clicking the illuminated letter icon/top left, will open the letter window.

Clicking the Red Letter light icon, will open the letter window (Image 11) and various items will be flagged for action. In the case of notification/lien letters that are to be sent automatically via electronic certified mail, the certified icon to the right side of the window is illuminated **Green**. Clicking on the **Green** icon will generate the information required for the notification/lien letter and push this letter as a cyber document to DPO to be collected daily by the the United States Post Office or its agent for processing and entry into the mail stream. If you are not using automated electronic certified mail as your notification/lien letter process, clicking the yellow print icon will create a local hardcopy. Using a standard #10 window envelope, the hardcopy can be taken to the Post Office and mailed as a certified letter.

The USPS clears and processes electronic certified mail six days a week. Letters created and pushed by the VSF to DPO by 10 AM ET will be processed by the USPS that business day. Letters created and pushed to DPO by the VSF after 10 AM will be collected and processed by USPS the next business day. Note: USPS does not process electronic certified mail letters other than business days.

Note: Texas VSF's to clarify your understanding of the five day mailing requirements under Occupations Code 14, Chapter 2303/151, please read The Texas Supreme Court Ruling on Civil Procedures, Rule 4, and Rules 21A, and 21B. This clarifies Chapter 2303/151 as meaning five business days, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays.

Once processed by USPS return information regarding the letter status will be automatically received by the VTS app and entered into the storage lot record and available for viewing, (see certified mail window) this will include the following:

- USPS article number / Post Office tracking information

- Proof of Mailing (USPS form Firm Book 3877)

- Proof of Payment

- Electronic Copy of the Original Letter

- An itemized audit trail of the letter process, including Proof of Delivery. (If delivery was completed.) If the USPS was unable to deliver the certified mail, the hardcopy letter will be returned to the sender, left unopened as proof of process. (See reference above to June 15, 2017, change in Texas legislation)

Step 6 – Troubleshooting

If your state DMV provides you with "Raw Data" and you ran a VIN for a Chevrolet Malibu and the DMV returns data for a Dodge, then it is a certainty that you have an incorrect VIN information. Follow this step-by-step correction process

- Open the MVR sub window, and use the Delete button to remove the MVR "Raw Data" including **ALL** owner/lienholder and title information. Click on the Save button in the sub window, and exit.

- In the main Storage Lot window, locate the Ownership Information, highlight each line item, (owner and lienholder information) delete **ALL**, and save. If there is a **"Lime Green Flag"** click and open the Certified window which will reveal additional incorrect ownership and if applicable lienholder information. Double-click on any alternate owner or lienholder line items, (Usually these are the bottom lines) and delete. Do not forget to Save before exiting this window.

- Have someone, go and take a photograph of the vehicle VIN and send it to the VSF operator, who will then compare and re-enter the correct VIN number. If the VIN number originally entered matches the new information, you should consider the possibility that the TAG or license plates may not be valid, and may indeed be stolen, giving you a false state of registration. If this vehicle was a police nonconsent tow, it is usual for the law enforcement agency to advise the tow company that the vehicle is suspect and may be stolen. However, the NCIC and your state data (Texas/TCIC) may not have been updated at the time of the incident.

- If you suspect that the TAG or plates may be from a different vehicle, we suggest that you access your (ADD123.com account) location the **"National Title Pointer"** to obtain information on the state in which the vehicle was last registered. Having obtained the last state of record, and if it is a state for which ADD has DMV access, within the VTS app, change the two-digit state code (TX, FL, etc.) to reflect the new information, and checking that all prior DMV information has been deleted and the storage lot record saved, run a fresh MVR. If you have followed this process and you receive an updated MVR for a Chevrolet Malibu, carefully read and validate the VIN, the TAG or license plate, the make, model, and year.

- Next, re-open the Certified Mail window and verify that only the ownership and lienholder records, reflect the sample Chevrolet Malibu not some other make/model. If there is any reference below the first and final ownership notice, and the first and final lienholder notice, highlight and delete these ownership/lienholder records.

Typical Error Observation: VTS Systems recently received a call from an upset tow company owner having discovered that 12, notification/lien letters had gone out for one vehicle. On researching the client's problem VTS Tech Support discovered that multiple MVR's had been run on incorrect VIN numbers without either verifying the original VIN source, or deleting the prior information. Moreover, it is almost certain that the operator did not understand the ramifications of his/her actions, was distracted, and by not deleting incorrect owner/lienholder references in the certified mail window, wasted $67.00 in postage. Imagine how this error could have compounded if the state DMV charged $25 or more for each owner and lienholder record. ($25 x 10 = $250) In addition, the owners attention was drawn to this operator error by phone calls from irate individuals complaining that they had received notification/lien letters of an impounded vehicle that they did not own or recognize.

Using the fully automated VTS/ADD electronic certified mail and DMV process is a relatively simple and foolproof operation if you follow the step-by-step guidelines. If you are an owner or a VSF operator and you are unsure having read this document of your ability to comply or perform the task, VTS Systems will be more than happy to retrain any employee at no charge, who requires improved knowledge and or guidance on their daily tasks.

If you require additional training on VTS Systems software applications please call the following number 877.374.7225, Option/Extension 3.

End