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## Cities get lift from parking fines

By Debbie Howlett, USA TODAY

CHICAGO — Cities are jacking up parking fines and cracking down on unpaid tickets as a way to raise much-needed revenue.

The National League of Cities says 47% of the nation's cities raised fees and fines last year. Most of the added money came from parking tickets. Revenue from these fines and fees now rivals property taxes as a major source of municipal income, says the league's Chris Hoene.

Every \$1 spent issuing tickets or collecting fines reaps \$5 in revenue, according to New York's Independent Budget Office. "Writing parking tickets is like printing money for cities," says Glen Bolofsky, who founded [www.parkingticket.com](http://www.parkingticket.com) to help drivers contest parking tickets in several cities.

City officials say parking tickets are issued to maintain safe streets. "We see it as a quality of life issue," says Bea Reyna-Hickey, Chicago's director of revenue. But "when there are budget constraints, you have to look at all possible sources of revenue."

Chicago expects to issue about the same number of tickets — 3.5 million — as it has each of the past five years. But the city should collect about \$170 million this year, a 52% increase over the past two years.

New York expects to collect \$540 million this fiscal year from parking tickets, up from \$414 million in 2003 and \$380 million in 2002. New York effectively doubled its parking fines in late 2002, says Doug Turetsky of the city's Independent Budget Office.

### Examples of recent tax hikes

Fine	New York City	San Francisco	Washington, D.C.
Expired meter	\$65, up from \$55	\$40, up from \$23	\$25, up from \$15
Fire hydrant	\$120, from	\$25, from \$23	remains \$50

San Francisco expects to collect \$87 million this year in parking fines after it raised most fines last year for the first time in a decade. "During budget deliberations, the instructions from the mayor were to look at every service and every fee," says Diana Hammons of the Department of Parking and Traffic.

Other cities are planning to increase revenue by going after scofflaws who owe

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	\$55		
Blocked driveway	\$100, from \$55	\$75, from \$50	\$30, from \$25

Source: USA TODAY research

unpaid tickets. For instance, Detroit is owed \$30 million on 1.5 million unpaid parking tickets dating back five years. Birmingham, Ala., hopes its crackdown on unpaid parking fines will prevent the city from having to cut its budget. Last year, \$1.4 million in fines went uncollected.

Chicago now puts a boot on a car if three tickets are unpaid, rather than five. The city also tracks violators when they change license plates. The effort surprises drivers.

Lauren Love, 38, a saleswoman, earlier this month contested a \$50 ticket that was issued 12 years ago. The ticket ended up being thrown out because it had a wrong address. But the administrative law officer still warned Love that there is no statute of limitations on outstanding parking tickets.

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