Many students who leave their cars in the Lowe's parking lot may come back to find something missing.

Last Thursday afternoon, tow trucks began to remove the cars of students who decided to park in the Lowe's parking lot, instead of in one of the several lots at Highline.

“This happens every year,” said Brad Morrison, the manager of Lowe's. “Last year, we were patient, but eventually had to start towing and then it stopped. It started off the same pattern this year.”

Usually, Morrison will put out warning notices on students’ cars for two weeks. If the student continues to park at Lowe's, then the towing begins, Morrison said.

“We usually stand and watch [students] come in and walk over to the bus stop,” he said. “If there's a car I put a notice on and it's still there two hours later, it's not a customer. Our customers don't park over in the corner of the lot.”

The first few weeks of any new quarter at Highline tend to bring parking difficulties, students say. Due to the limited availability of spots combined with the mass of students arriving at the same time, students often find parking in neighborhood side streets or in other locations, such as Lowe's.

“I had one guy yesterday [who] saw me out there so he goes into the store, came out and he had bought something,” Morrison said. “Then I stepped away and watched [as] he got his backpack, went to school, and left his car out there for five hours that day. I'm going to tow people that do that.”

Towing has proved an effective measure to stop students, Morrison said.

“It makes them think twice before they do it,” he said. “I know some people might think it's not a big deal, but if we open it up to everybody, pretty soon Lowe's parking lot would be an extension parking lot for Highline College and then I wouldn't have parking for my customers.”

When students fill up the lot, it hinders customers from parking at Lowe's, Morrison said.

There are costly consequences of parking in unpermitted areas or in “no parking” zones. This may include pricey tickets or even having your car towed.

When your car is towed, it could cost more than $300 to retrieve. Airport Towing, a local family business commonly used by Lowe’s to remove cars, charges $240 per hour with an additional $60 storage fee per day, said Kenny Savage, the general manager of Airport Towing.

“Washington state legislatures set the rates,” Savage said. “All the rates are on file with the courts, so [every towing company] is the same.”

Both Morrison and Savage said the consequences are all policies and are set in place to be fair to all people.

“[Highline] should provide adequate parking for your students,” Morrison said. “I even see cars in there with parking permits, so my assumption is that the school doesn't provide enough parking for the associate population. That's something [Highline] needs to look at. It's not fair to students to not have a place to park.”

Opinions about parking in unpermitted areas varied between students.

“I had to choose between being late for a test or parking somewhere I’m not supposed to,” said one student who asked to remain anonymous. “I took the risk because my grades matter more to me than a ticket.”

For some students, seeing the tow truck in action was enough to scare them into new parking habits.

“I parked at Lowe’s a few times, but when I saw the cars being towed, I decided not to chance it anymore,” said Victoria, a first year student at Highline. “I don’t even know what I’d do if my car was towed.”

Instead of losing the never-ending battle for parking, some students have decided to carpool and others chose to arrive earlier than usual to find a spot and beat the rush, they say.