

# Custodial Searches

## 900.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidance regarding searches of individuals in custody. Such searches are necessary to eliminate the introduction of contraband, intoxicants or weapons into the Fargo Police Department facility or Cass County Jail. Such items can pose a serious risk to the safety and security of department members, individuals in custody, contractors and the public.

Additional procedures for booking and releasing an arrestee at the Fargo Police Department are outlined in the Custodial Booking Procedure (SOP 900). Guidance for custody searches when transporting a person in custody may be found in the Transporting Persons in Custody Policy (902).

Nothing in this policy is intended to prohibit the otherwise lawful collection of evidence from an individual in custody.

### 900.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

**Custody Search** - An in-custody search of an individual and of his/her property, shoes and clothing, including pockets, cuffs and folds on the clothing, to remove all weapons, dangerous items, evidence, and contraband prior to booking. For purposes of this policy, a search incident to arrest is considered a custody search.

**Physical Body Cavity Search** - A search that includes a visual inspection and may include a physical intrusion into a body cavity. Body cavity means the stomach or rectal cavity of an individual, and the vagina of a female person.

**Search Incident to Lawful Arrest** - A search conducted contemporaneous to an arrest and includes a search of the arrestee, area readily accessible to the arrestee, and items in their possession, such as luggage, bags, purse, etc. The search is focused on weapons and the recovery of any evidence related to the arrest or contraband.

**Strip Search** - A search that requires an individual to remove or rearrange some or all of his/her clothing to permit a visual inspection of the underclothing, breasts, buttocks, anus or outer genitalia. This includes monitoring an individual who is changing clothes, where his/her underclothing, buttocks, genitalia or female breasts are visible.

## 900.2 POLICY

All searches shall be conducted with concern for safety, dignity, courtesy, respect for privacy and hygiene, and in compliance with policy and law to protect the rights of those who are subject to any search. In order to maintain officer safety, custodial searches should be conducted contemporaneously after the arrestee is secured in handcuffs and again before removing handcuffs for booking purposes.

Searches shall not be used for intimidation, harassment, punishment or retaliation.

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#### **900.3 SEARCHES AT POLICE FACILITIES**

Custody searches shall be conducted on all individuals in custody, upon entry to the Fargo Police Department facilities for booking purposes. Except in exigent circumstances, the search should be conducted by a member of the same sex as the individual being searched. If a member of the same sex is not available, a witnessing member must be present during the search.

Custody searches should also be conducted any time an individual in custody enters or re-enters a secure area, or any time it is reasonably believed that a search is necessary to maintain the safety and security of the facility (N.D.C.C. § 12-44.1-15).

##### **900.3.1 PROPERTY**

Members shall take reasonable care in handling the property of an individual in custody to avoid discrepancies or losses. Property retained for safekeeping during the booking process shall be kept in a secure location until the individual is released or transferred. All money shall be counted in front of the individual from whom it was received prior to booking and captured on the member's body-worn camera.

Some property may not be accepted by a facility or agency that is taking custody of an individual from this department, such as weapons or large items. These items should be retained for safekeeping in accordance with the Property and Evidence Policy.

If circumstances dictate that an arrestee's property is not returned following booking at the Fargo Police Department, all property shall be inventoried by objective description (this does not include an estimated value). The individual from whom it was taken shall be required to sign the completed inventory. If the individual's signature cannot be obtained, the inventory shall be witnessed by another department member or recorded on the member's body-worn camera. The inventory should include the case number, date, time, member's Fargo Police Department identification number and information regarding how and when the property may be released.

#### **900.4 STRIP SEARCHES**

No individual in temporary custody for booking at any Fargo Police Department facility shall be subjected to a strip search unless there is reasonable suspicion based upon specific and articulable facts to believe the individual has a health condition requiring immediate medical attention or is concealing a weapon or contraband. Factors to be considered in determining reasonable suspicion include, but are not limited to:

- (a) The detection of an object during a custody search that may be a weapon or contraband and cannot be safely retrieved without a strip search.
- (b) Circumstances of a current arrest that specifically indicate the individual may be concealing a weapon or contraband.
  - 1. A felony arrest charge or being under the influence of a controlled substance should not suffice as reasonable suspicion absent other facts.
- (c) Custody history (e.g., past possession of contraband while in custody, assaults on department members, escape attempts).

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- (d) The individual's actions or demeanor.
- (e) Criminal history (i.e., level of experience in a custody setting).

No transgender or intersex individual shall be searched or examined for the sole purpose of determining the individual's genital status. If the individual's genital status is unknown, it may be determined during conversations with the person, by reviewing medical records, or as a result of a broader medical examination conducted in private by a medical practitioner (28 CFR 115.115).

Members should not allow a person subject to a strip search the ability to remove the weapon or contraband on their own. Members should retrieve the items in conformity with this policy.

#### 900.4.1 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE FIELD STRIP SEARCHES

Strip searches at Fargo Police Department facilities shall be conducted as follows (28 CFR 115.115):

- (a) Written authorization from the Shift Commander shall be obtained prior to the strip search.
- (b) All members involved with the strip search shall be of the same sex as the individual being searched, unless the search is conducted by a medical practitioner.
- (c) All strip searches shall be conducted in a professional manner under sanitary conditions, utilizing appropriate protective equipment, and in a secure area of privacy so that it cannot be observed by those not participating in the search. The search shall not be reproduced through a visual or sound recording.
- (d) Whenever possible, a second member of the same sex should also be present during the search, for security and as a witness to the finding of evidence.
- (e) Members conducting a strip search should not touch the breasts, buttocks or genitalia of the individual being searched.
- (f) The primary member conducting the search shall prepare a written report to include:
  - 1. The facts that led to the decision to perform a strip search.
  - 2. The reasons less intrusive methods of searching were not used or were insufficient.
  - 3. The written authorization for the search, obtained from the Shift Commander.
  - 4. The name of the individual who was searched.
  - 5. The name and sex of the members who conducted the search.
  - 6. The name, sex and role of any person present during the search.
  - 7. The time and date of the search.
  - 8. The place at which the search was conducted.
  - 9. A list of the items, if any, that were recovered.
  - 10. The facts upon which the member based his/her belief that the individual was concealing a weapon or contraband.

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- (g) No member should view an individual's private underclothing, buttocks, genitalia or female breasts while that individual is showering, performing bodily functions or changing clothes, unless he/she otherwise qualifies for a strip search. However, if serious hygiene or health issues make it reasonably necessary to assist the individual with a shower or a change of clothes, a supervisor should be contacted to ensure reasonable steps are taken to obtain the individual's consent and/or otherwise protect his/her privacy and dignity.

### **900.4.2 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE FIELD STRIP SEARCHES**

A strip search may be conducted in the field only with Shift Commander authorization and only in exceptional circumstances, such as when:

- (a) There is probable cause to believe that the individual is concealing a weapon or other dangerous item that cannot be recovered by a more limited search.
- (b) There is probable cause to believe that the individual is concealing controlled substances or evidence that cannot be recovered by a more limited search, and there is no reasonable alternative to ensure the individual cannot destroy or ingest the substance during transportation.

These special-circumstance field strip searches shall only be authorized and conducted under the same restrictions as the strip search procedures in this policy, except that the Shift Commander authorization does not need to be in writing.

### **900.5 PHYSICAL BODY CAVITY SEARCH**

Physical body cavity searches shall be subject to the following:

- (a) No individual shall be subjected to a physical body cavity search without written approval of the Shift Commander and only upon issuance of a search warrant. A copy of any search warrant and the results of the physical body cavity search shall be included with the related reports and made available, upon request, to the individual or authorized representative (except for those portions of the warrant ordered sealed by a court).
- (b) Only a physician may conduct a physical body cavity search.
- (c) Except for the physician conducting the search, persons present must be of the same sex as the individual being searched. Only the necessary department members needed to maintain the safety and security of the medical personnel shall be present.
- (d) Privacy requirements, including restricted touching of body parts and sanitary condition requirements, are the same as required for a strip search.
- (e) All such searches shall be documented, including:
  - 1. The facts that led to the decision to perform a physical body cavity search of the individual.
  - 2. The reasons less intrusive methods of searching were not used or were insufficient.
  - 3. The Shift Commander's approval.

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4. A copy of the search warrant.
  5. The time, date and location of the search.
  6. The medical personnel present.
  7. The names, sex and roles of any department members present.
  8. Any contraband or weapons discovered by the search
- (f) A copy of the written authorization shall be retained and made available to the individual who was searched or other authorized representative upon request.

Any suspected evidence, contraband or weapon that is fully inside of or partially protruding from a body cavity shall be retrieved in conformity with this section.

#### **900.6 TRAINING**

The Training and Development Unit Lieutenant shall ensure members have training that includes (28 CFR 115.115):

- (a) Conducting searches of cross-gender individuals.
- (b) Conducting searches of transgender and intersex individuals.
- (c) Conducting searches in a professional and respectful manner, and in the least intrusive manner possible, consistent with security needs.

#### **900.7 REVISION DATE 06/17/2025**