

Search and Seizure

311.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Both the federal and the state constitutions provide every individual with the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures. This policy provides general guidelines for Fargo Police Department personnel to consider when dealing with search and seizure issues.

311.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Fargo Police Department to respect the fundamental privacy rights of individuals. Members of this department will conduct searches in strict observance of the constitutional rights of persons being searched. All seizures by this department will comply with relevant federal and state law governing the seizure of persons and property.

The department will provide relevant and current training to officers as guidance for the application of current law as well as local community standards and prosecutorial considerations to specific search and seizure situations as appropriate.

311.3 SEARCHES

The U.S. Constitution generally provides that a valid warrant is required in order for a search to be valid. There are, however, several exceptions to the rule that permit a warrantless search.

Examples of law enforcement activities that are exceptions to the general warrant requirement include, but are not limited to, searches pursuant to the following:

- Valid consent
- Incident to a lawful arrest
- Legitimate community caretaking interests
- Vehicle searches under certain circumstances
- Exigent circumstances

Certain other activities are recognized by federal and state courts, and by certain statutes as legitimate law enforcement activities that also do not require a warrant. Such activities may include seizure and examination of abandoned property and observations of activities and property located on open public areas.

Because case law regarding search and seizure is constantly changing and subject to interpretation by the courts, each member of this department is expected to act in each situation according to current training and his/her familiarity with clearly established rights as determined by case law.

Whenever practicable, officers are encouraged to contact a supervisor or other available resource to resolve questions regarding search and seizure issues prior to electing a course of action.

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311.4 SEARCH PROTOCOL

Although conditions will vary and officer safety and other exigencies must be considered in every search situation, the following guidelines should be followed whenever circumstances permit:

- (a) Officers of this department will strive to conduct searches with dignity and courtesy.
- (b) Officers should explain to the person being searched the reason for the search and how the search will be conducted.
- (c) Searches should be carried out with due regard and respect for private property interests and in a manner that minimizes damage.
- (d) In order to minimize the need for forcible entry, an attempt should be made to obtain keys, combinations or access codes when a search of locked property is anticipated.
- (e) Whenever practicable, a search should not be conducted by a lone officer. A cover officer should be positioned to ensure safety and should not be involved in the search.
- (f) When the person to be searched is of the opposite sex as the searching officer the following guidelines should be followed:
 - 1. Another officer or a supervisor should witness the search.
 - 2. The officer should not search areas of the body covered by tight-fitting clothing, sheer clothing or clothing that could not reasonably conceal a weapon.

311.5 DOCUMENTATION

Officers are responsible for documenting any search in which evidence is seized and insure any required reports are sufficient including documentaitn of the following:

- (a) Reason for the search
- (b) The results of the search including a description of any property or contraband seized
- (c) All steps taken to secure the property at the conclusion of the search
- (d) Supervisors shall review reports to ensure the reports are accurate, the actions are properly documented and the current legal requirements and policies have been met