

Search and Seizure

309.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

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

309.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Irvine 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, local community standards and prosecutorial considerations regarding specific search and seizure situations, as appropriate.

309.3 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 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
- 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 to resolve questions regarding search and seizure issues prior to electing a course of action.

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309.3.1 RESIDENCE

Absent a valid search warrant, exigent circumstances, probation or parole authorization, or valid consent, every person has a reasonable expectation of privacy inside his/her home. Individuals do not, however, generally have a reasonable expectation of privacy in areas around their home where the general public (e.g., mail carriers & solicitors) would reasonably be permitted to go.

309.3.2 PLAIN VIEW

Because an individual does not have an expectation of privacy as to items that are in plain view, no "search" has taken place in a constitutional sense when an object is viewed from a location where the officer has a right to be.

An item in plain view may generally be seized when all of the following conditions exist:

- (a) It was viewed from a lawful location
- (b) There is probable cause to believe that the item is linked to criminal activity
- (c) The location of the item can be legally accessed

It is important to note that the so-called "Nexus Rule" requires that even items in plain view must not be seized unless there is probable cause to believe that the item will aid in an investigation. Such a nexus should be included in any related reports.

309.3.3 EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Exigent circumstances permitting entry into premises without a warrant or valid consent generally include any of the following:

- (a) Imminent danger of injury or death
- (b) Serious damage to property
- (c) Imminent escape of a suspect
- (d) The destruction of evidence

An exigency created by the officer's own conduct as an excuse for a warrantless entry is not generally permitted.

309.4 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) Members 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. Property should be left in a condition as close as reasonably possible to its pre-search condition.

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- (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) When the person to be searched is of the opposite sex as the searching officer, a reasonable effort should be made to summon an officer of the same sex as the subject to conduct the search. When it is not practicable to summon an officer of the same sex as the subject, 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.

309.5 DOCUMENTATION

Officers shall ensure that any required reports are sufficient including, at minimum, documentation of the following:

- Reason for the search
- Any efforts used to minimize the intrusiveness of any search (e.g., asking for consent or keys)
- What, if any, injuries or damage occurred
- All steps taken to secure property
- The results of the search, including a description of any property or contraband seized
- If the person searched is the opposite sex, any efforts to summon an officer of the same sex as the person being searched and the identification of any witness officer

Supervisors shall review reports to ensure the reports are accurate, that actions are properly documented and that current legal requirements and department policy have been met.