



Policy Number: 310 – Search and Seizure
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Approved By: Denis Otterness, Chief of Police

310.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Federal and State constitutions provide every individual with the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures. This policy provides general guidelines for Montana State University Billings Police Department (Department) officers to consider when dealing with search and seizure issues.

310.2 POLICY

It is the policy of this 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.

Montana state law specifies that a search or entry by law enforcement, in a student's residence in campus housing, must be governed by standards and procedures no less stringent than those applicable to intrusions on private quarters outside of the University campus and must be in accordance with city, county, state and federal laws (§ 20-25-511 and § 20-25-514, MCA).

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.

310.3 SEARCHES

The U.S. Constitution generally provides that a 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:

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

310.4 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 from 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.
- 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 solo 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, 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.

310.5 DOCUMENTATION

Officers are responsible for documenting any search and ensuring that any required reports are sufficient including, at minimum, documentation of:

- 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.

310.6 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

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