


## Search and Seizure

### 312.1 POLICY HEADER

<b>Original Effective Date:</b>	<b>Revised Date:</b>
September 1, 2021	December 6, 2023
Authorization:  Jason Haberman Chief of Police	

### 312.2 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 Mt. Lebanon Police Department personnel to consider when dealing with search and seizure issues.

### 312.3 POLICY

It is the policy of the Mt. Lebanon 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.

### 312.4 SEARCHES AND INVENTORIES

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:

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

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- Exigent circumstances.

Certain other activities are recognized by federal and state courts and by certain statutes as legitimate law enforcement activities that may 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.

Further exceptions may include the following:

- Pat-down weapons search (i.e., stop and frisk as outlined in *Terry v. Ohio*) (see the Contacts and Temporary Detentions Policy for additional guidance)
- Crime scenes (i.e., protective sweep, though further investigation may require a search warrant)
- Inventories of property (see the Vehicle Towing Policy and the Custodial Searches Policy for additional guidance)
- Plain view, plain touch, and plain smell searches
- Open field searches
- Seizures of suspended, revoked, canceled, or disqualified driver's licenses
- Emergency aid

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 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.

#### **312.4.1 PENNSYLVANIA SEARCH RESTRICTIONS**

Pennsylvania court rulings are generally more restrictive when interpreting the Pennsylvania Constitution than the federal courts' interpretation of the United States Constitution.

#### **312.5 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) 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, 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.

### **312.6 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.

Watch Commanders 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.