




**PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND  
FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER**

<b>General Order Number:</b> 06-19	<b>Effective Date:</b> January 11, 2020
<b>Division:</b> Emergency Operations	
<b>Chapter:</b> Forcible Entry	
<b>By Order of the Acting Fire Chief:</b> Tiffany D. Green 	<b>Issue Date:</b> January 11, 2020

**POLICY**

This General Order shall establish the procedures utilized prior to and after forcing entry into a secured structure or vehicle. All means of entry to a dwelling or vehicle shall be examined before forcing entry. Forcible entry shall be used as a last resort when a life safety or hazardous condition has been identified. Utilization of this procedure will require involvement of law enforcement. At no time shall the Department force entry and leave a dwelling or vehicle unsecured without notification to a property representative and/or law enforcement.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Clear** - A term used by law enforcement; it is the determination that an area or space in which a person could be concealed, and/or could conceal other threats (i.e. IED) to first responders or the public, does not contain a threat. An area that has been “cleared” by law enforcement is analogous to the fire department’s primary search. It is a cursory search for persons in a given area. It does not mean the area has been methodically searched.

**Concealment** - A position which offers being hidden from view, but does not offer protection from ballistic threats.

**Cover** - A strategic position which offers protection from gun fire/blast effect. **Cover is a dynamic term depending on the weapons system.** What might offer cover from a handgun might not defeat the threat from a rifle.

**Forcible Entry** – Entering a structure or vehicle by using force to open a door or window.

**Risk Benefit Analysis** – Examination of the potential positive and negative results of undertaking a specific course of action.

**Unit Officer** – Company officer or individual in charge of a specific unit riding in the officer seat of the apparatus.

**PROCEDURES / RESPONSIBILITIES**

**I. Purpose**

- A. This policy will outline the expectations and guidelines for a unit Officer in Charge (OIC) to make an informed decision prior to forcible entry.



## **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER**

### **II. General Guidelines**

- A. At no time will personnel force entry into a vehicle or structure unless an actual or potential life safety or other hazardous condition exists. The OIC should conduct a size-up and perform a risk benefit analysis when considering the need to force entry at residential fire alarms when there is no evidence of smoke or fire.
- B. If the property or vehicle owner (or responsible party) is on the scene, personnel will advise them of the following prior to forcing entry:
  - 1. The potential for an undetermined amount of property damage, depending on the force required. It should be remembered, however, that the majority of incidents do not justify indiscriminate damage in order to gain entry into a secured dwelling or vehicle.
  - 2. The County is not responsible for any damage that results from forcing entry into the vehicle or dwelling.
  - 3. If the property or vehicle owner (or responsible party) is on the scene and it is not a situation requiring immediate forcible entry, personnel will obtain verbal consent prior to forcing entry.
- C. Anyone requesting assistance for non-emergency lockouts will be referred to a locksmith or other private enterprise, as appropriate. Personnel will not recommend a specific vendor.
- D. Personnel shall make a reasonable attempt to determine vehicle or property ownership and responsibility or residence prior to forcing entry into a vehicle or dwelling.
- E. If the call for service originated outside of Public Safety Communications (PSC), the OIC will notify PSC of the location and nature of the incident so a call record can be generated.
- F. Personnel should use forcible entry tools instead of body parts, thus avoiding personal injury.
- G. This policy shall not apply to Fire Marshals conducting law enforcement investigations.



## **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER**

### **III. Determination**

#### **A. Immediate Forcible Entry**

1. Immediate forcible entry should be considered by the OIC for any of following reasons:
  - a) There is smoke, fire, or another emergent condition requiring fire department action (food on the stove, iron left on, broken water pipes, medical alarms or medical emergency, etc.).
  - b) The call originated from the residence.
  - c) Can see someone through a window in need of emergency assistance.
2. Forcing entry into a structure, considerations:
  - a) Infant or toddler left unattended inside.
  - b) Handicapped or incapacitated person inside.
  - c) Extreme weather.
  - d) Special circumstances at the OIC's discretion.
3. Forcing entry into vehicles or other modes of transportation:
  - a) An infant, child, handicapped or incapacitated person, or animal is locked inside the vehicle and a life threatening, or risk of injury, condition exists.
  - b) Special circumstances at the OIC's discretion, such as time of day and weather conditions.

### **IV. Procedures**

#### **A. General**

1. Confirm the address with PSC if caller is not on scene.
2. Determine need to access.
3. Request/verify law enforcement response through PSC. If immediate life threat, these requests should be made a priority.
4. If the caller cannot provide a phone number for the residence, contact PSC to utilize Reverse 911 to contact the residence.
5. Survey the structure for unlocked doors (360 check).
6. Ensure your unit is within eyesight and its emergency warning lights are flashing.
7. Give an audible alert on arrival using the siren or air horn.
8. Await law enforcement arrival, unless immediate life threat as determined by Unit OIC.
9. While forcing entry, the OIC shall ensure the minimum amount of personnel and equipment are utilized to successfully perform the task. Other personnel not directly involved should attempt to position themselves behind cover. Concealment should be utilized if cover is not available.



## PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

10. Personnel forcing entry must have a portable radio and should utilize ballistic protection if appropriate and available.
11. **Never** enter a home without the resident's knowledge; allow the police to "clear" the structure first. This will avoid misidentification by residents who are caught off guard and react defensively, potentially causing harm to personnel.
12. Prior to making entry, loudly identify yourself verbally: "Fire Department." For awareness, each member of the crew should announce "Fire Department" as they enter the structure.
13. Force entry with as little damage as possible, depending on the severity of the situation.
14. The OIC should maintain situational awareness, listening to and observing family members and witnesses.

### V. Documentation

A. Thorough documentation of the reasons for forcible entry and the methods used shall be provided in the appropriate report.

#### B. Structures

1. If the structure's owner/responsible party is not on the scene, personnel will complete the *Forcible Entry Verification Form* and forward to the Operational Safety Office.
2. If the building cannot be re-secured and the owner/responsible party is not on scene, law enforcement must be requested and personnel must remain on scene until their arrival.
3. The appropriate report must be completed depending on the call type (Fire or EMS).

#### C. Vehicles

1. If the vehicle owner/responsible party is not on scene, law enforcement must be requested and personnel must remain on scene until their arrival.
2. The appropriate report must be completed depending on the call type (Fire or EMS).

### REFERENCES

N/A

### FORMS / ATTACHMENTS

Forcible Entry Verification Form



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND  
FIRE/EMS DEPARTMENT



## Forcible Entry Verification Form

Completion of this form will assist our insurance carrier in properly processing property damage claims submitted to the County. Please complete this form in its entirety and send it to [pgfdos@co.pg.md.us](mailto:pgfdos@co.pg.md.us) for appropriate processing.

Incident Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Forced Entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Station/Unit #'s: \_\_\_\_\_

Unit OIC: \_\_\_\_\_

Career or Volunteer OIC: \_\_\_\_\_

Police CCN# (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative of Incident:** Narrative should include the reason for dispatch, conditions on arrival, which doors/windows were forced, outcome of incident, etc. (\*give no medical information).

**\*\*Note: This form is intended to collect information for insurance claims processing only. This form is NOT intended to place blame or indicate fault, and is not to be used for disciplinary purposes.**

Report Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_