


FORT SMITH POLICE DEPARTMENT

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SUBJECT	Explosive and Shotgun Breaching		
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APPROVED BY			

I. Purpose and Scope

- A. The purpose of this policy is to establish the guidelines by which members of the Fort Smith Police Department's SWAT Team employ the use of tactical options referred to as explosive breaching and shotgun breaching. This policy shall apply to all sworn personnel.

II. Policy

- A. One function of the Fort Smith Police Department SWAT Team is to provide specialized tactical support in situations where a crisis escalates beyond the capabilities of field or investigative personnel. Additionally, the SWAT Team may be utilized to provide assistance to investigative personnel in the service of high-risk search or arrest warrants. During these situations, it may become necessary for the team to execute entry into a hostile environment, necessitating that the point of entry be breached as quickly and safely as possible.
- B. It shall be the policy of the Fort Smith Police Department to authorize explosive breaching to gain entry in certain situations in a manner that presents minimal risk to tactical officers, innocent victims, and suspects.

III. Definitions

- A. *Explosive Breach* – Use of explosives to breach entry/access points and porting. The precise application of measured amounts of explosive compounds to affect an opening.
- B. *Breacher* – Is a specialized role within a SWAT Team, responsible for gaining entry into fortified or barricaded structures during high-risk operations. A Breacher is trained in the construction, placement, and firing of explosive breaching charges. The Breacher is tasked with overcoming physical barriers such as doors, walls, or windows using a variety of tools and techniques to allow the team to execute its mission, which may include hostage rescue, counter-terrorism, or serving high-risk warrants.
- C. *Assistant Breacher* – A member of the SWAT Team who works and trains under the direction of the Breacher and assists the Breacher in the construction, placement, or firing of an explosive breaching charge. An Assistant Breacher shall have attended the 8-hour certified Entry Team charge placement course instructed by the department's Breachers.

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- D. *Explosive Breaching Device* – A target-specific device constructed with explosives and nonexplosive materials for the purpose of gaining entry into a structure.
- E. *Frangible Rounds* – A shotgun round made from material that is designed to disintegrate on contact with a hard surface.

IV. Explosive Breaching Procedure

- A. The decision to utilize an explosive breach will be at the discretion of the SWAT Team Commander, or Assistant Commander, based on available information and intelligence.
- B. **Only the Breacher, or the Assistant Breacher at the direction of the Breacher, shall be authorized to perform the placement of all explosive breaching devices.**
- C. Thorough and meticulous scouting, coupled with comprehensive target analysis, is a critical pre-breach responsibility for both the Breacher and the Assistant Breacher. This analysis may incorporate intelligence gathered from confidential informants, among other sources.
- D. Construction of the explosive breaching device to be used varies from situation to situation. Each device is designed, in composition and construction, based on the breaching needs, known target intelligence and past training and experiences of the Breacher. The Breacher shall have the responsibility for the construction of all explosive breaching devices.
- E. Prior to setting the explosive breach, the Breacher will present a "Breachers' Brief" to the SWAT Team Commander, SWAT team members, and other personnel involved in the operation. The "Breachers' Brief" will inform the SWAT Team Commander of the anticipated outcomes of the breach, including structural effects and safety considerations, to facilitate optimal positioning of team members.
- F. Positioning of the entry team during the explosive breach will be the responsibility of the SWAT Team Leader, based on information provided by the Breacher and Assistant Breacher during the "Breachers' Brief."
- G. The best initiation sequence of the explosive breach will be determined by the circumstances of the entry. This sequence may or may not include a countdown, depending on whether the safety of the team would be compromised.
 - 1. If a countdown is used, a guideline for initiation may be as follows:
 - a. After the explosive breaching device is set and the entry team positioned, all team members will indicate they are ready and in position for the breach by the last member in line squeezing the shoulder or the leg of the member in front of them.
 - b. Control of the assault will then be directed to the Entry Team Leader, and the Entry Team Leader will direct the Breacher and/or Assistant Breacher to initiate the breach.
 - c. The Breacher and/or the Assistant Breacher will then begin a countdown from 5 to 1 and will initiate the breach on the count of 1.
 - 2. If a countdown is not used, a guideline for initiation may be as follows:

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- a. After the Breacher or Assistant Breacher sets the explosive breaching device, the Breacher or Assistant Breacher will go down the Entry Team line to insure everyone is in position.
 - b. Control of the assault will then be directed to the Entry Team Leader.
 - c. The Entry Team Leader will then direct the Breacher and/or Assistant Breacher to initiate the breach immediately.
- H. At the conclusion of the operation, it shall be the responsibility of the Breacher and/or Assistant Breacher to complete a "Breachers Report." The "Breachers Report" will detail the specific composition of the explosive charges used, the type of charge utilized, and the results of the breach. The report shall also include the name of the Breacher who constructed the charge and the location where the charge was employed. The original "Breachers Report" will be maintained in a file within the explosive storage box, with a digital copy stored in a secure database. A copy of the report shall be submitted to the SWAT Team Commander and forwarded to the Chief of Police.

V. Safety Considerations (Explosive Breaches)

- A. Explosive breaching techniques are useful tools; however, it may not be appropriate in all breaching situations. **An explosive breach shall not be employed when:**
 - 1. The material in the construction of doors, walls, or building material is unknown;
 - 2. The locations of the occupants / victims are unknown;
 - 3. Children present in the residence;
 - 4. There is a presence of unstable chemicals or other incendiary materials; or
 - 5. Other means of mechanical breaching techniques are effective and safe to use.
- B. Tactical EMS (TEMS) shall be present during SWAT operations and training where explosive breaching techniques are performed. If TEMS is unavailable, an EMS unit shall be called to standby near the scene while explosive breaching techniques are being performed.
- C. **The handling and use of explosive materials shall be conducted in accordance with established safety protocols and applicable federal and departmental regulations.**
- D. **The Breacher or Assistant Breacher will be responsible for the construction, setting, and initiation of the explosive breaching device and shall, at all times, maintain control of the initiating device to prevent accidental detonation by unauthorized individuals.**
- E. Double priming will be standard procedure to ensure positive detonation of breaching charges.
- F. All members of the SWAT team will wear safety clothing and equipment during explosive entry training and operations, including but not limited to: a helmet, gloves, eye protection, hearing protection, a long-sleeved shirt and pants, a ballistic vest, and boots. All gear shall meet applicable and departmental safety standards.

VI. Handling Misfires

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- A. Handling misfires and non-functioning breaching devices are the responsibility of the Breacher. The Breacher will follow established procedures that may include the following:
 - 1. In the event of a misfire, the Breacher or Assistant Breacher may re-cock the initiator and fire the device again.
 - 2. In the event of a second misfire, the Breacher or Assistant Breacher may call for a secondary breach.
 - 3. Upon calling for a secondary breach, the Breacher shall remove the breaching device and place it safely away from team members.
 - 4. The Breacher will be responsible for security of the removed device.

VII. Storage

- A. All explosives will be stored within the Police Department Armory in a locked explosive box. The Breacher, Assistant Breacher, SWAT Team Commander, and the Assistant Commander will be the only personnel with access to the storage box. One additional key will be maintained within the Police Department key inventory cabinet located within the Deputy Director of Administrative Services office.
- B. United States Federal Explosives Law Title 27 Part §555.204 regarding the inspection of magazines states any person storing explosive materials shall inspect the storage magazines and its contents at least once every seven (7) days. This inspection is to be completed by the Breacher or the Assistant Breacher and shall be noted on the log maintained in a secured place outside the magazine with the “Breachers Reports”.
- C. Additionally, the Breacher and/or Assistant Breacher must keep a written record of all explosives used with an indication of the date, time and location used. This record will be maintained in conjunction with the “Breachers Report” for a record of inventory documenting the use of the explosives.

VIII. Training and Documentation - Explosive Breaching

- A. The Breacher and Assistant Breacher will attend an explosive breaching course prior to performing operational breaches. Additionally, the Breacher and Assistant Breacher shall attend certified refresher training at least triennially in order to maintain their skills and keep up with the latest techniques, available materials, and newly identified safety issues.
- B. Explosive breach training will be coordinated and conducted no less than semi-annually and shall involve all members of the SWAT Team. The training shall include explosive breaching that involves at least one of the basic principles of cut, push and blast.
- C. The Breacher and/or the Assistant Breacher, to document explosive entry training and operations, will maintain a Breaching Log. This log may be used as a database for future use when determining the most appropriate charge to be selected.

IX. Shotgun Breaching Procedure

- A. Based on all information available at the time of the incident, the option to utilize a shotgun as a breaching tool will be at the discretion of the SWAT Team Commander or Assistant Commander.

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- B. As a shotgun breaching round may be utilized to force entry through only certain types of doors, scouting and target analysis are an important pre-breach responsibility of the Breacher and/or Assistant Breacher.
- C. The SWAT Team Commander may elect to utilize a 12-gauge shotgun as a breaching tool against wood interior or exterior doors or metal doors, up to an eighteen (18) gauge fire door. If a shotgun is to be utilized as a breaching tool, it will be done using only **frangible** rounds approved by the SWAT Team Commander.
- D. As a door is usually held in place by three hinges and a locking mechanism, to gain entry the Breacher or Assistant Breacher will have to defeat either the hinges or the locking mechanism. The Breacher and/or Assistant Breacher, as a result of their scouting and target analysis, will decide what area of the door to target. The preferred target area of the door shall be the locking mechanism.

X. Safety Considerations (Shotgun Breaching)

- A. The Fort Smith Police Department’s SWAT Team will utilize only approved, frangible shotgun rounds for shotgun breaching purposes. **Any round utilized for shotgun-breaching purposes may cause potentially lethal fragmentation as pieces of the locking mechanism are rapidly dislodged during forced entry of a door.**
- B. The possibility exists for injury to the shooter from debris that is dislodged from the target area caused by the impact of the round on the target, or by material from the round itself ricocheting back at the shooter.
- C. To minimize the possibility of injury to the shooter as well as other personnel in the area, all personnel will wear the following safety equipment when using a shotgun for forced entry:
 - 1. Suitable eye and ear protection;
 - 2. Gloves;
 - 3. Long sleeved uniform;
 - 4. Body armor; and
 - 5. Ballistic helmet.

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