

Asset Forfeiture

606.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy describes the authority and procedure for the seizure, forfeiture and liquidation of property associated with designated offenses.

606.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Fiscal agent - The person designated by the Sheriff to be responsible for securing and maintaining seized assets and distributing any proceeds realized from any forfeiture proceedings. This includes any time the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office seizes property for forfeiture or when the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office is acting as the fiscal agent pursuant to a multi-agency agreement.

Forfeiture - The process by which legal ownership of an asset is transferred to a government or other authority.

Forfeiture reviewer - The office member assigned by the Sheriff who is responsible for reviewing all forfeiture cases and for acting as the liaison between the Office and the assigned attorney.

Property subject to forfeiture - Generally includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Firearms that were carried, possessed, or sold illegally (RCW 9A.10.098).
- (b) Devices, profits, proceeds, associated equipment, and conveyances related to illegal gambling (RCW 9A.46.231).
- (c) Interest, proceeds, and real or personal property related to organized crime, criminal profiteering, human trafficking, commercial sexual abuse of a minor, or promoting prostitution (RCW 9A.82.100).
- (d) Proceeds traceable to or derived from money laundering (RCW 9A.83.030).
- (e) Property acquired or maintained in relation to commercial sexual abuse of a minor, promoting commercial sexual abuse of a minor, or promoting prostitution in the first degree, and conveyances used to facilitate these offenses (RCW 9A.88.150).
- (f) Personal property, including money, weapons, and vehicles, that was used to commit a felony or was acquired through the commission of a felony not covered under another forfeiture statute (RCW 10.105.010).
- (g) Personal property, including money, weapons, and vehicles, that was acquired through the commission of a crime involving theft, trafficking, or unlawful possession of commercial metal property, or facilitating such crimes (RCW 19.290.230).
- (h) Conveyances, including aircraft, vehicles, or vessels, used for the violation of the Uniform Controlled Substances Act and proceeds from these violations (e.g., money, real property) (RCW 69.50.505).
- (i) Boats, vehicles, gear, or other equipment used for poaching/wildlife crimes (RCW 77.15.070).
- (j) Vehicles used to commit the crime of racing (RCW 46.61.748).

Kitsap County Sheriff's Office

Asset Forfeiture

Seizure - The act of law enforcement officials taking property, cash, or assets that have been used in connection with or acquired by specified illegal activities.

606.2 POLICY

The Kitsap County Sheriff's Office recognizes that appropriately applied forfeiture laws are helpful to enforce the law, deter crime and reduce the economic incentive of crime. However, the potential for revenue should never compromise the effective investigation of criminal offenses, officer safety or any person's due process rights.

It is the policy of the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office that all members, including those assigned to internal or external law enforcement task force operations, shall comply with all state and federal laws pertaining to forfeiture.

606.2.1 SPECIAL GUIDELINES APPLICABLE TO CONVEYANCES

Special guidelines apply regarding the forfeiture of conveyances (aircraft, vehicles and vessels) in order for it to be seized as a conveyance that has been used to facilitate narcotic activity. All conveyances are subject to seizure and forfeiture, except (RCW 69.50.505(1)(d)):

- When the conveyance is used by any person as a common carrier in the transaction of business as a common carrier, unless it appears that the owner or other person in charge of the conveyance is a consenting party or has knowledge of the narcotics violations.
- When violations have been committed or omitted without the owner's actual knowledge or consent.
- When the conveyance is used in the receipt of an amount of marijuana for which possession constitutes a misdemeanor under RCW 69.50.4014.
- When the conveyance is secured by a loan and the lender had no knowledge of, nor consented to, the act or omission.
- When the owner of a conveyance has been arrested for narcotics violations, the conveyance in which the person was arrested is not subject to forfeiture unless it is either seized or a court order has been issued for its seizure within 10 days of the owner's arrest.

606.3 ASSET SEIZURE

Property may be seized for forfeiture as provided in this policy.

606.3.1 PROPERTY SUBJECT TO SEIZURE

The following may be seized upon review and approval of a supervisor and in coordination with the forfeiture reviewer:

- (a) Real or personal property subject to forfeiture identified in a court order authorizing seizure.

Kitsap County Sheriff's Office

Asset Forfeiture

- (b) Property subject to forfeiture without a court order when the property is lawfully seized incident to an arrest, the service of a search warrant, or the service of an administrative inspection warrant.
- (c) Property subject to forfeiture can also be seized without a court order when:
 - 1. There is probable cause to believe that the property was used or is intended to be used for illegal gambling (RCW 9A.46.231).
 - 2. There is probable cause to believe that the property was used or is intended to be used for the commercial sexual abuse of a minor or promoting prostitution in the first degree (RCW 9A.88.150).
 - 3. There is probable cause to believe that the property was used or is intended to be used in the commission of any felony (RCW 10.105.010). See also separate statutes regarding seizures for felonies involving commercial metal, "bootlegging," criminal profiteering, or money laundering (RCW 19.290.230; RCW 66.32.020; RCW 9A.82.100; RCW 9A.83.030).
 - 4. There is probable cause to believe that the property was used or is intended to be used in violation of the Uniform Controlled Substances Act (RCW 69.50.505).
 - 5. There is probable cause to believe that the property was used or is intended to be used for poaching/wildlife crimes (RCW 77.15.070).

A large amount of money standing alone is insufficient to establish the probable cause required to make a seizure.

Whenever practicable, a court order for seizure prior to making a seizure is the preferred method.

606.3.2 PROPERTY NOT SUBJECT TO SEIZURE

The following property should not be seized for forfeiture:

- (a) Cash and property that does not meet the forfeiture counsel's current minimum forfeiture thresholds should not be seized.
- (b) Property from an "innocent owner," or a person who had no knowledge of the offense or who did not consent to the property's use.
- (c) No vehicle or other conveyance based on a misdemeanor involving the possession of cannabis (RCW 69.50.505).
- (d) Vehicles/conveyances that would be subject to forfeiture if more than 10 days have elapsed since the owner's arrest and no court order has been issued (RCW 9A.46.231; RCW 9A.88.150; RCW 69.50.505).

606.3.3 SEIZED VEHICLES

Vehicles seized subject to forfeiture will be taken to a designated secure storage facility. A seized vehicle should not be impounded. The deputy seizing the vehicle shall notify the detective supervisor of the seizure of the vehicle and circumstances of the seizure as soon as possible.

If the vehicle cannot be driven, a tow truck will be used to tow the vehicle to the storage facility.

Asset Forfeiture

Personal property located in a seized vehicle shall be removed and booked into Property as either evidence or for safekeeping.

606.4 PROCESSING SEIZED PROPERTY FOR FORFEITURE PROCEEDINGS

When property or cash subject to this policy is seized, the deputy making the seizure should ensure compliance with the following:

- (a) Complete applicable seizure forms and present the appropriate copy to the person from whom the property is seized. If cash or property is seized from more than one person, a separate copy must be provided to each person, specifying the items seized. When property is seized and no one claims an interest in the property, the deputy must leave the copy in the place where the property was found, if it is reasonable to do so.
- (b) Complete and submit a report and original seizure forms within 24 hours of the seizure, if practicable.
- (c) Forward the original seizure forms and related reports to the forfeiture reviewer within two days of seizure.

The deputy will book seized property as evidence with the notation in the comment section of the property form, "Seized Subject to Forfeiture." Property seized subject to forfeiture should be booked on a separate property form. No other evidence from the case should be booked on this form.

Photographs should be taken of items seized, particularly cash, jewelry and other valuable items.

Deputies who suspect property may be subject to seizure but are not able to seize the property (e.g., the property is located elsewhere, the whereabouts of the property is unknown, it is real estate, bank accounts, non-tangible assets) should document and forward the information in the appropriate report to the forfeiture reviewer.

606.5 MAINTAINING SEIZED PROPERTY

The Property and Evidence Unit Supervisor is responsible for ensuring compliance with the following:

- (a) All property received for forfeiture is reasonably secured and properly stored to prevent waste and preserve its condition.
- (b) All property received for forfeiture is checked to determine if the property has been stolen.
- (c) All property received for forfeiture is retained in the same manner as evidence until forfeiture is finalized or the property is returned to the claimant or the person with an ownership interest.
- (d) Property received for forfeiture is not used unless the forfeiture action has been completed.

Kitsap County Sheriff's Office

Asset Forfeiture

606.6 FORFEITURE REVIEWER

The Sheriff will appoint a forfeiture reviewer. Prior to assuming duties, or as soon as practicable thereafter, the forfeiture reviewer should attend a course approved by the Office on asset forfeiture.

The responsibilities of the forfeiture reviewer include:

- (a) Remaining familiar with forfeiture laws, particularly those cited in this policy and the forfeiture policies of the forfeiture counsel.
- (b) Serving as the liaison between the Office and the forfeiture counsel and ensuring prompt legal review of all seizures.
- (c) Making reasonable efforts to obtain annual training that includes best practices in pursuing, seizing, and tracking forfeitures.
- (d) Deciding whether the forfeiture is more appropriately made under state or federal forfeiture laws. The forfeiture reviewer should contact federal authorities when appropriate.
- (e) Ensuring that responsibilities, including the designation of a fiscal agent, are clearly established whenever multiple agencies are cooperating in a forfeiture case.
- (f) Ensuring that seizure forms are available and appropriate for office use. These should include notice forms, a receipt form, and a checklist that provides relevant guidance to deputies. The forms should be available in languages appropriate for the region and should contain spaces for:
 - 1. Names and contact information for all relevant persons and law enforcement officers involved.
 - 2. Information as to how ownership or other property interests may have been determined (e.g., verbal claims of ownership, titles, public records).
 - 3. A space for the signature of the person from whom cash or property is being seized.
 - 4. A tear-off portion or copy, which should be given to the person from whom cash or property is being seized, that includes the legal authority for the seizure, information regarding the process to contest the seizure, and a detailed description of the items seized.
- (g) Ensuring that deputies who may be involved in asset forfeiture receive training in the proper use of the seizure forms and the forfeiture process. The training should be developed in consultation with the appropriate legal counsel and may be accomplished through traditional classroom education, electronic media, Daily Training Bulletins (DTBs), or Departmental Directives. The training should cover this policy and address any relevant statutory changes and court decisions.
- (h) Reviewing each asset forfeiture case to ensure that:
 - 1. Written documentation of the seizure and the items seized is in the case file.
 - 2. Independent legal review of the circumstances and propriety of the seizure is made in a timely manner.

Kitsap County Sheriff's Office

Asset Forfeiture

3. Notice of intent to seek forfeiture has been given in a timely manner to those who hold an interest in the seized property.
 4. Property is promptly released to those entitled to its return.
 5. All changes to forfeiture status are forwarded to any supervisor who initiates a forfeiture case.
 6. Any cash received is deposited with the fiscal agent.
 7. Assistance with the resolution of ownership claims and the release of property to those entitled is provided.
 8. Current minimum forfeiture thresholds are communicated appropriately to deputies.
 9. This policy and any related policies are periodically reviewed and updated to reflect current federal and state statutes and case law.
- (i) Ensuring that a written plan is available that enables the Sheriff to address any extended absence of the forfeiture reviewer, thereby ensuring that contact information for other law enforcement officers and attorneys who may assist in these matters is available.
 - (j) Ensuring that the process of selling or adding forfeited property to the office's regular inventory is in accordance with all applicable laws and consistent with the office's use and disposition of similar property.
 - (k) Upon completion of any forfeiture process, ensuring that no property is retained by the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office unless the Sheriff authorizes in writing the retention of the property for official use.
 - (l) Addressing any landlord claims for reimbursement through forfeited assets or damage to property (RCW 9.46.231; RCW 69.50.505).
 - (m) Compensating victims of commercial metal crimes within 120 days (RCW 19.290.230).

Forfeiture proceeds should be maintained in a separate fund or account subject to appropriate accounting control, with regular reviews or audits of all deposits and expenditures.

Forfeiture reporting and expenditures should be completed in the manner prescribed by the law and County financial directives.

606.7 DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY

No member of this department may use property that has been seized for forfeiture until the forfeiture action has been completed and the Sheriff has given written authorization to retain the property for official use. No department member involved in the decision to seize property should be involved in any decision regarding the disposition of the property.