



# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual



## 6.181 – Performing Inventory Searches

Effective Date: 06/18/2012

### 6.181-POL

This policy applies when an officer impounds a vehicle, takes possession of personal property for safekeeping, or for personal property that has accompanied an arrestee to a secure police or jail facility.

This policy does not apply to Evidence Unit staff who comply with procedures adopted by that unit.

This policy also does not apply to found property. See [Manual Section 7.020 - Found Property](#).

#### 1. Inventory Searches Serve an Administrative Function

Inventory searches are not searches incident to arrest. They are administrative in nature and are necessary to:

- Protect and account for property of the arrested person.
- Protect the officer and Department from false claims.
- Isolate dangerous items from police and jail facilities.

Inventory searches are not a substitute for obtaining a search warrant or consent.

Inventory searches of personal property or vehicles must occur as close in time as practical to placing an arrestee in a secure police or jail facility or impoundment of the vehicle.

#### 2. Officers Will Inventory Vehicles and Personal Items

Officers will inventory the contents of all vehicles to be impounded and all personal property for safekeeping or that has accompanied an arrestee to a secure police facility.

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**Exception:** Officers will not perform the inventory search if the entire vehicle, personal item, or contents are considered evidence or must remain untouched pending a search warrant.

**Exception:** If an arrestee is eligible for bail, officers will not inventory the arrestee's property until after the arrestee has had the opportunity to post bail.

### 3. Vehicle Inventory Searches Do Not Include the Trunk, Closed Containers, or Locked Vehicles

When impounding a vehicle to a tow company's storage lot, officers may not enter or access the trunk or closed containers inside of the vehicle in an effort to perform an inventory search. Officers will list these closed containers as sealed units on the Vehicle Report or Custodial Property Summary. Officers will treat locked vehicles as a sealed unit.

**Exception:** Officers may inventory closed containers or the trunk if there is a reasonable belief that items inside may pose a danger to the officer or police facility. Officers must be able to articulate supporting facts.

### 4. Officers Will Place Valuable Items into Evidence

If an officer is inventorying a vehicle that contains cash, jewelry, or other items of significant value that cannot be secured inside the vehicle, then the officer will place those items into Evidence.

### 5. Officers Will Use the Designated Form to Document Inventories

Officers will use the Custodial Property Summary to document inventory searches.

**Exception:** Officers may use either the Tow/Impound Record or the Custodial Property Summary to document an inventory search of a vehicle.

### 6. CSI Personnel May Perform Inventory Searches for Follow-Up Units

As a courtesy to follow-up units, Crime Scene Investigations (CSI) detectives may perform the inventory search of a vehicle held in the vehicle processing room before releasing it to the owner. During these searches, CSI detectives may locate contraband or other suspicious items.

If the items found are illegal to possess, the CSI detective will seize the items and log them into evidence. If the detective believes that other items

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found may constitute evidence of a crime, the detective performing the inventory search will immediately end the search.

\*\*\*In either situation, the detective will complete a supplement report and notify the follow-up unit named on the Vehicle Report. The named follow-up unit is responsible for the disposition or re-assignment of the case.\*\*\*