



Seattle Police Department Policy Manual



6.185 – Search Warrants

Effective Date: 03/01/2016

6.185-POL

This policy applies to administrative, dynamic, and high-risk search warrants. For information specific to DUI blood warrants see [Section 15.280-DUI Investigations](#).

1. Defining the Types of Search Warrants

Administrative Search Warrant – A warrant that is served in a police-controlled environment (e.g., police precinct, vehicle processing room) or is otherwise low-risk.

Dynamic Search Warrant – A warrant that is served where officers expect forced entry, and it is unknown if persons present are armed. Though higher risk than an administrative warrant, it does not rise to the level of a high-risk warrant.

High-Risk Search Warrant – A warrant that is served where there are known armed persons at the location, or the location is barricaded.

2. Sergeants or Above Must Approve Search Warrants

A sergeant or above approves administrative search warrant service.

A lieutenant or above approves dynamic and high-risk search warrant service.

If any high-risk factors are present, the lieutenant will consult with SWAT.

A captain or above approves search warrants to be served outside the city.

See [6.280-Warrant Arrests and Pre-Planned Arrest Operations](#) for the approval process required for some warrant arrests.

3. Dynamic and High-Risk Warrants Require a Risk Assessment

When evaluating a dynamic or high-risk warrant, the sergeant or above will complete the [SWAT Risk Assessment \(form 12.2\)](#) See 6.185-PRO-2.

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4. SPD SWAT is the Designated Unit to Serve High-Risk Warrants

5. Warrants Served Outside the City Must Relate to Seattle Crime

In order for SPD personnel to serve a warrant outside the city, the warrant must be associated with criminal activity in Seattle.

Exception: A permanent captain or above may approve exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

6. Officer Must “Deconflict” Narcotics Warrants

The day before the planned warrant service, the detective or sergeant in charge of a narcotics search warrant must check the target location for simultaneous warrants or investigations by other law enforcement agencies. See 6.185-TSK-3.

7. Outside Agencies May Serve SPD Warrants in Their City

For warrant service outside the city, SPD may allow local agencies to serve warrants in their jurisdiction if the agency chooses and has the ability.

If SPD serves the warrant, the SPD sergeant or above in charge of the warrant will notify a supervisor from the local agency and request the supervisor be present at the warrant execution.

8. Sergeant or Designee Writes Operations Order and Briefs/Debriefs

For dynamic and high-risk warrants, a sergeant or designee will write an operations order and conduct a tactical briefing, with all personnel involved, before the warrant service. The operations order must be approved by the section chain of command.

The sergeant or designee will follow the warrant service with a debriefing for all personnel involved.

9. Sergeant or Above Completes After Action Report

For dynamic and high-risk warrants, the sergeant or above who was in charge of the warrant service will complete the After-Action Report (form 28.1).

The sergeant will forward this report through the chain of command to the level of Bureau Chief.

10. Bureau Chief keeps After Action Report

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The originating unit's Bureau Chief will review and retain the After-Action Report.

11. Officers Shall Not Call Judges' Personal Numbers After Hours Without Approval

Officers will attempt to contact an on-call judge through SPD Communications.

A sergeant may authorize an officer to call a judge's personal number if Communications cannot reach the on-call judge.

6.185-PRO-1 Administrative Search Warrant Procedure

Officer or Detective

1. **Screens** the anticipated warrant service with a sergeant or above

Sergeant or Above

2. **Reviews** the circumstances and any preliminary paperwork and approves if appropriate

Officer or Detective

3. **Completes** the search warrant using the forms in the [Search Warrant Resource Center](#). See 6.185-TSK-1 or TSK-2
4. **Serves** the search warrant
5. **Assembles** a search warrant packet. See 6.185-TSK-1 or TSK-2
6. **Files** the warrant with the appropriate court and delivers copies to the SPD Data Center Unit. See 6.185-TSK-5, 6, or 7
 - a. If the case will be assigned for follow-up, **sends** the warrant packet to the appropriate follow-up unit for filing.

Detective

7. **Files** the warrant with Municipal or Superior court as indicated on the Search Warrant Packet Cover Sheet. See 6.185-TSK-5, 6, or 7

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6.185-PRO-2 Dynamic and High-Risk Search Warrant Procedure

Officer or Detective

1. **Screens** the anticipated warrant service with a sergeant or above

Ultimate approval must be from a lieutenant or above.

Sergeant or Above

2. **Reviews** the circumstances and any preliminary paperwork

Officer or Detective

3. **Completes** the search warrant using the forms in the [Search Warrant Resource Center](#). See 6.185-TSK-1 or TSK-2
 - a. While completing the warrant, **contacts** NWHIDTA or WSIN, if appropriate, to check the target location for conflicts. See 6.185-TSK-3

Sergeant or Above

4. **Evaluates** the warrant using the [SWAT Risk Assessment \(Form 12.2\)](#)
 - a. **Consults** with SWAT Lieutenant or SWAT Sergeant.
 - b. **Re-screens** the warrant with SWAT any time there is new information that increases the warrant's risk.
5. **Delivers** the completed Risk Assessment back to the primary officer or detective for inclusion in the case packet

Investigating Unit or SWAT

6. **Serves** the search warrant per unit guidelines

Sergeant or Above

7. **Completes** the After-Action Report (form 28.1)
8. **Forwards** the After-Action Report to the Bureau Chief via the chain of command

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Bureau Chief

9. **Retains** the After-Action Report

Officer or Detective

10. **Files** the warrant with the appropriate court. See 6.185-TSK-[5](#), [6](#), or [7](#)

6.185-TSK-1 Completing the Search Warrant (In Person, Business Hours)

When writing a warrant and presenting it to a judge in person and during business hours, the **officer or detective**:

1. **Completes** the search warrant and affidavit using the forms in the [Search Warrant Resource Center](#) leaving the affidavit unsigned
2. **Calls** to arrange for a meeting with a judge to sign the warrant:
 - a. Superior Court (Felony/Other County)
 - b. Municipal Court (Misdemeanor Only)

Phone numbers for the above are available only to Seattle Police employees and are exempt from disclosure to the public by RCW 42.56.420(1)(a).
3. **Serves** the warrant
 - a. During the warrant service, completes the inventory and return of service.
4. **Leaves** a copy of the warrant and return of service at the location
(**Does not** leave any copies of the affidavit)
5. **Completes** the Search Warrant Cover Sheet
6. **Assembles** a warrant packet grouping the originals together and the copies together to include:
 - Search Warrant Packet Cover Sheet
 - Affidavit (+1 copy)
 - Warrant (+1 copy)

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- Return of Service (+1 copy)
- Inventory (+1 copy)
- After-Action Report (if applicable, grouped with copies)

6.185-TSK-2 Completing a Felony Search Warrant (After Hours)

When writing a felony warrant after hours, the **officer or detective**:

1. **Completes** the search warrant and affidavit using the forms in the Search Warrant Resource Center in [Ingress](#), leaving the affidavit unsigned
2. **Obtains** the Seattle Municipal Court hotline number from Communications personnel by calling 684-8640
3. **Contacts** the on-call judge via the hotline
4. **Obtains** approval from the judge per the judge's instructions
 - a. If the warrant is telephonic, **coordinates** with Communications to have the call recorded and flagged for retention
5. **Serves** the warrant
 - a. During the warrant service, **completes** the inventory and return of service
6. **Leaves** a copy of the warrant and return of service at the location of the search

(**Does not** leave any copies of the affidavit)
7. **Completes** the Search Warrant Cover Sheet
8. **Assembles** a warrant packet grouping the originals together and the copies together to include:
 - Search Warrant Packet Cover Sheet
 - Affidavit (+1 copy)
 - Warrant (+1 copy)
 - Return of Service (+1 copy)
 - Inventory (+1 copy)

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- After Action Report (if applicable, grouped with copies)

6.185-TSK-3 Completing a Misdemeanor Warrant (After Hours)

When writing a misdemeanor warrant after hours, the **officer or detective**:

1. **Determines** they have probable cause to search for evidence of a misdemeanor crime (DUI, Vehicle Searches, etc.)
2. **Drafts** a search warrant and search warrant affidavit using the forms in the [Search Warrant Resource Center](#).
3. **Obtains** approval of the draft from their sergeant
4. **Obtains** the Seattle Municipal Court hotline number from Communications personnel by calling 684-8640
5. **Contacts** the on-call judge via the hotline
6. **Emails** the completed search warrant and affidavit to judge
7. **Serves** the warrant
 - During the warrant service, **completes** the inventory and return of service
8. **Leaves** a copy of the warrant and return of service at the location of the search
 - (**Does not** leave any copies of the affidavit)
9. **Completes** the Search Warrant Cover Sheet
10. **Assembles** a warrant packet grouping the originals together and the copies together to include:
 - Search Warrant Packet Cover Sheet
 - Affidavit (+1 copy)
 - Warrant (+1 copy)
 - Return of Service (+1 copy)
 - Inventory (+1 copy)
 - After Action Report (if applicable, grouped with copies)

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11. **Files** the warrant with the court as outlined in 6.185-TSK-7

6.185-TSK-4 Deconflicting the Search Warrant Location

Before conducting a narcotics search warrant, the **officer or detective**:

1. **Obtains** current phone number for High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) or Western States Information Network (WSIN) from one of the following (via Communications after hours):

- Narcotics
- Investigation Support
- SWAT

2. **Gives** the following information:

- Name and organization
- Call back number
- Address of target location and cross street
- Time of the operation
- Expected duration of the operation
- Type of drug
- Name of any other involved agency

3. For warrants to be served outside Seattle, **contacts** the local agency having jurisdiction

6.185-TSK-5 Filing the Search Warrant (District Court)

(Removed 10/23/20)

6.185-TSK-6 Filing the Search Warrant (Superior Court)

To file the warrant after service, the **officer or detective**:

1. **Obtains** the next available sequential warrant number online via King County [Ingress](#)
2. **Writes** the warrant number on the originals and the copies

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3. **Takes** the originals to the Superior Court Clerk's cashier counter located in room E609 on the 6th floor
4. **Returns** the copies of the warrant to the SPD Data Center Unit for scanning

6.185-TSK-7 Filing the Search Warrant (Seattle Municipal Court)

To file the warrant after service, the **officer or detective**:

1. **Scans** all documents related to the warrant into a .pdf file
2. **Emails** the documents to [SMC Search Warrant Return@seattle.gov](mailto:SMC_Search_Warrant_Return@seattle.gov)
- 2a. **Includes** the Report Number in the subject line of the email
3. **Sends** the warrant packet containing originals to the Data Center in an Alert Packet
4. **Receives** confirmation email from the court for the warrant within 72 hours