



Tattoos and Body Modification

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The Vermont State Police recognizes the personal appearance of its sworn personnel, when in the public eye, is a way in which the public formulates attitudes about our Department. Further, personal appearance can have an impact on public confidence and thereby on the ability of personnel to perform official duties.
- 1.2 To establish standards for acceptable and unacceptable tattoos and body modifications applicable to all Department members.

2.0 Definitions

- 2.1 Tattoo means a permanent mark on the skin created by puncturing the skin and inserting pigment, dye, or other substance to establish a design, form, figure, or art.
- 2.2 Branding means the intentional burning of the skin to establish a design, form, figure, or art.
- 2.3 Scarification means the intentional cutting of the skin to establish a design, form, figure, or art.
- 2.4 Gauging means gradually increasing the radius of an opening in the flesh in areas such as the ear lobes.
- 2.5 Body modification means but is not limited to; tongue splitting or bifurcation, the complete or trans-dermal implantation of any object(s) (other than hair replacement); abnormal shaping of the ears, eyes, nose; abnormal filing of the teeth; branding; scarification; or gauging.
 - A. The definition of body modification includes facial piercings to include, but not limited to, tongue piercings, lip piercings, nose piercings, and brow piercings.
 - B. Body modification shall not include those procedures which are

medically necessitated by deformity or injury, or generally accepted changes/augmentations performed by a licensed medical professional.

2.6 Extremist tattoos, scarifications, or brands are those affiliated with, depicting, and/or symbolizing extremist philosophies, organizations, or activities. Extremist philosophies, organizations, and activities are those which advocate racial, gender and/or ethnic hatred or intolerance; advocate, create, or engage in illegal discrimination based on race, color, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin; and/or advocate violence or other unlawful means of depriving individual rights under the U.S. Constitution, Federal, or State law. For purposes of this policy, extremist shall also include indecent, sexist, or racist.

A. Indecent tattoos, scarifications, or brands are those that are grossly offensive to modesty, decency, or propriety; shock the moral sense because of their vulgar, filthy, or disgusting nature or tendency to incite lustful thought; or tend reasonably to corrupt morals or incite libidinous thoughts.

B. Sexist tattoos, scarifications, or brands are those that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on gender or gender identity, but that may not meet the same definition of “indecent.”

C. Racist tattoos, scarifications, or brands are those that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on race, ethnicity, or national origin.

2.7 The Tattoo Review Committee shall be comprised of three (3) members and two (2) alternates appointed by the Director. The committee will be overseen by the Staff Operations Commander and shall be responsible to assess the content and appearance of any tattoo or body modification reported in accordance with this policy for the purpose of determining whether it meets the definition of extremist, indecent, sexist, or racist.

3.0 Policy

3.1 It is the policy of the Vermont State Police that sworn members shall maintain a professional appearance that will encourage public confidence in the members of this department.

A. The Vermont State Police has a set of standards ([VSP-DIR-103 Personal Appearance](#) and [VSP-DIR-325 Uniforms](#)) which guide members to provide uniformity and ensure a professional appearance. At all times,

Department members will be neatly groomed and in conformance with these standards unless ordered to do otherwise by the member's division commander due to his or her particular assignment.

- 3.2 All sworn members of the Vermont State Police shall present themselves in a manner which complies with the procedures outlined herein.

4.0 Procedure

4.1 Body Modifications

- A. Body modification of any area of the body that is visible while on-duty in any authorized uniform or attire is prohibited.
- B. No sworn member may use gold, platinum, or other dental veneers or caps for the purpose of ornamentation while on-duty. Teeth, whether natural, capped, or veneer shall not be ornamented with designs, jewels, initials, etc.
- C. While on-duty, members shall not display any body piercing jewelry with the exception of earrings worn in compliance with [VSP-DIR-103 Personal Appearance](#). This includes any facial jewelry not limited to tongue piercings, lip piercings, nose piercings, and brow piercings.
 1. Body jewelry that is completely concealed by an authorized uniform or approved attire need not be removed, however it shall not be otherwise displayed while the member is on-duty.

4.2 Tattoos

- A. No sworn member of the Department shall have any tattoo or body modification that is considered extremist.
- B. Under no circumstance shall any sworn member of the Department be permitted to have or add any tattoo, branding, scarification, or body art to the face, neck or hands (wrist to fingertips) with the exception of a commitment band on the ring finger.
- C. Commanders are responsible for documenting via photograph all existing tattoos and/or body modifications that are visible in any authorized uniform or attire of members hired prior to July 1, 2019.
 1. The photographs shall include:

- a. The name of the member;
 - b. The date the photo was taken;
 - c. A description of the tattoo, body piercing, branding, or body art;
 - d. The size and location on the member.
2. The photographs and any related notations shall be documented and stored at the Office of Professional Development.
 3. The Commander of the Office of Professional Development, or designee, shall be responsible for scheduling a time to document via photograph all existing tattoos and/or body modifications to a part of the body visible in any authorized uniform or attire of any sworn member hired after July 1, 2019. This shall be accomplished prior to field assignment.
 - a. The photographs shall include:
 - b. The name of the member;
 - c. The date the photo was taken;
 - d. A description of the tattoo(s) and/or body modification(s);
 - e. The size and location on the member.
 4. The photographs and any related notations shall be documented and stored at the Office of Professional Development.

D. Applicants

1. As part of the application process, any individual seeking employment as a sworn member of the Department shall be screened to assess whether he or she is in compliance with this policy.
 - a. Applicants will be supplied the definitions established in this policy and be required to disclose in writing ALL tattoo(s), branding(s), scarification(s), body piercing(s) or other body modifications regardless of location on the body on the Personal Integrity Questionnaire.

2. If an applicant is found to be in violation of this policy, it will be explained that the applicant may, at his or her sole discretion, have the non-compliant tattoo(s), branding(s), scarification(s), or body art or visible portion thereof, removed at his or her own expense and to the satisfaction of the department.
 3. Should an applicant express a willingness to remove a non-compliant tattoo(s), branding(s), scarification(s), or body art, his or her application will be placed on hold until the removal process is completed and a re-evaluation for policy compliance has occurred.
 - a. Any portion of the application process that is deemed to have expired while an application is on hold under this provision, shall again be satisfactorily completed by the applicant.
 4. Removal of any markings will not per se absolve the applicant of being deemed as having such affiliation or adherence to said philosophies, organizations or activities that may be apparent in any phase of the selection process.
- 4.3 Any member who obtains a tattoo or body modification to a portion of the body visible in any authorized uniform or attire after July 1, 2019 shall make notification to his or her commander of this action within 72 hours of the commencement of his or her next tour of duty. This shall include the initiation of a tattoo or body modification not yet finalized.
- A. Notification shall not be necessary for body modification(s) which are medically or cosmetically recommended or necessitated by deformity or injury, or generally accepted changes/augmentations performed by a licensed medical professional.
 - B. The member shall be responsible for identifying the date obtained (or initiated if the tattoo or body modification is not yet finalized) and display to the commander the new tattoo(s) and or body modification(s).
 - C. Commanders are responsible for documenting via photograph the tattoo(s) and/or body modification(s) newly obtained.
 1. The photographs shall include:
 - a. The name of the member;
 - b. The date the photo was taken;

- c. A description of the tattoo(s) and/or body modification(s);
 - d. The size and location on the member;
 - e. The date obtained by the member.
2. The photographs and any related notations obtained shall be documented and stored at the Office of Professional Development.

4.4 Tattoo Review Committee

- A. All members of the Tattoo Review Committee, overseen by the Staff Operations Commander, will be appointed by the Director.
- B. The Tattoo Review Committee shall be comprised of three (3) members and two (2) alternates.
 1. Committee members shall consist of two (2) commanders and one (1) non-commissioned officer (Sergeant). One (1) commander will be appointed to serve as chairperson.
 2. Alternates shall consist of one (1) commander and one (1) non-commissioned officer (Sergeant).
 3. An alternate will be utilized when a committee member is unavailable. When employing an alternate, the structure of the committee as two (2) commanders and one (1) non-commissioned officer (Sergeant) will be maintained.
- C. The committee shall assess the content and appearance of any tattoo or body modification reported in accordance with this policy for the purpose of determining whether it meets the definition of extremist, indecent, sexist, or racist.
- D. The committee shall issue a final determination in writing.
 1. If the tattoo or body modification is not deemed to be extremist, indecent, sexist, or racist; the final determination shall be considered permissible and so noted in the committee's report.
 2. Should any portion of the tattoo or body modification be determined by the committee as extremist, indecent, sexist, or racist; this shall be

documented in the committee's report along with an explanation for this finding.

E. The committee's report shall be stored at the Office of Professional Development and accompany other records relating to the tattoo or body modification.

4.5 Obtaining a body modification or a tattoo depicting content deemed to be extremist per the definition above or to a prohibited area (face, neck, or hands); or failing to report a new tattoo and/or body modification in violation of this policy will be considered a Part A Misconduct infraction in accordance with [VSP-GEN-202](#).

Effective July 1, 2019

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The Vermont State Police Manual provides only internal Vermont State Police guidance. It is not intended to, does not, and may not be relied upon to create any rights, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law by any party in any civil, criminal, or administrative matter. It is not intended to and does not apply in any criminal or civil proceeding outside of internal Department proceedings. No policy included in this publication should be construed as creating a higher legal standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense with respect to third party claims.