POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 400.1

Firearms Guidelines

Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards:
1.1.0 & 1.1.10

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1. PURPOSE:

To establish Worcester Police Department (Department) guidelines for the authorization, carrying, storage, qualification, inspection, and accountability of firearms. The use of any firearm as a force option is governed exclusively by Policy 400 Use of Force. Nothing in this policy expands or limits the authority to use force set forth in Policy 400 Use of Force.

2. POLICY:

Officers are issued firearms and trained in their use for self-protection and for the protection of the public. Firearms shall be carried, stored, maintained, and used in accordance with this policy, Policy 400 Use of Force, the training set forth by the Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC), and all applicable state and federal laws.

3. AUTHORITY TO CARRY:

Officers are authorized to carry Department issued or authorized firearms at all times when on duty and may carry such firearms while off duty within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, unless prohibited by court order or by order of the Chief of Police. The legal authority to carry and use weapons, and the conditions on which that authorization is granted, revoked, or suspended, are set forth in Policy 400 Use of Force, Sections IV.K.1 through IV.K.5, and are not restated here.

Non-Sworn Personnel. Non-sworn Animal Control personnel are authorized to carry a Department issued firearm as set forth in Policy 93 Authorized Weapons and Ammunition. That authorization extends to the use of a firearm against an animal, under the circumstances set forth for officers in Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.K.7.e, applied to Animal Control personnel. Nothing in this policy limits the right of any person, including non-sworn personnel, to act in defense of themselves or another to the same extent as any other person under law. Non-sworn personnel authorized to carry a firearm shall meet the same training, certification, qualification, inspection, and reporting requirements imposed on officers by this policy and by Policy 400 Use of Force. No other non-sworn position is authorized to carry or use a firearm. MPAC 1.1.0 [c]

Authority to carry and use less lethal weapons, including conducted energy weapons, is governed by Policy 400.2 Less Lethal Weapons and Restraints Guidelines.

4. AUTHORIZED FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION:

The firearms and ammunition authorized by the Department, by type and specification, including those authorized for tactical and specialized personnel, are listed and maintained in Policy 93 Authorized Weapons and Ammunition. The requirement that only Department-authorized weapons and ammunition be carried and used is set forth in Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.K.3.

Officers shall carry their issued service weapon while on duty unless authorized by the Chief of Police to carry a different weapon. Officers shall not carry a backup or secondary firearm while on duty.

An officer shall not alter or modify any firearm, ammunition, or firearm-related equipment in any way without the express permission of the Chief of Police, granted after review and testing by Department-authorized firearms instructors or the Training Division Armorer.

5. CARRYING, SECURITY, AND STORAGE:

The security, storage, and safe handling requirements for firearms and other weapons, both on and off duty, including safe handling rules, limits on access by persons other than authorized Department personnel, storage at Department facilities and at an officer's residence, the prohibition on leaving weapons unsecured, and the requirement to immediately report any loss or theft, are set forth in Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.K.6, and are not restated here.

Officers are responsible for keeping their issued firearms clean and in good working order. Any firearm that malfunctions shall be returned to the Training Division Armorer forthwith.

6. DRAWING AND DISPLAYING:

An officer should avoid the unnecessary display of firearms and should not draw a firearm except when there is justification for its use to accomplish a proper police purpose. However, in responding to any potentially dangerous situation, such as searching a building pursuant to a burglar alarm or approaching a business establishment on a report of a robbery in progress, the officer should carry the firearm in a position that will facilitate its speedy, effective, and safe use.

The pointing of a firearm at an individual is a use of force governed by Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.K.7.b, and shall be documented and reported in accordance with Policy 400 Use of Force, Sections IV.N and IV.O. Drawing or displaying a firearm without pointing it at an individual is not a use of force.

7. RESTRICTIONS:

All restrictions on the use of firearms, including the prohibition on warning shots, the prohibition on discharging a firearm into or at a fleeing motor vehicle, the conditions governing any discharge at a moving motor vehicle, the requirement to consider surroundings before discharging a weapon, the use of weapons against animals, the use of agency weapons for training and other authorized purposes, and the prohibition on carrying or using firearms while under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances or while otherwise impaired, are set forth in Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.K.7, and are not restated here.

In addition, firearms shall not be used as signaling devices or to summon assistance.

8. QUALIFICATION AND TRAINING:

A. Annual firearms qualification and skills training, proficiency testing, remedial training, and the monitoring and documentation of training and proficiency results are governed by Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.M, and are not restated here.

B. Qualification shall include an inspection of each firearm used by the officer to ensure that it is in good working condition.

C. No member of the Department shall be authorized to carry a firearm until the member has been issued copies of Policy 400 Use of Force and this policy; has received instruction on those policies; and has qualified at the range and demonstrated all applicable weapon handling safety procedures. The issuance of the policies, the instruction, and the qualification shall be documented in Department training files.

9. OFF-DUTY WEAPONS:

A. The Department does not authorize any firearm other than the officer's issued service weapon to be carried while off duty in the officer's capacity as a police officer.

B. An officer who is current in their annual firearms qualification may carry their issued service weapon while off duty. MPAC 1.1.10 [c]

C. This section does not apply to a firearm carried by an officer solely in a private capacity under the officer's own license to carry, or to a firearm used solely for recreational or sporting purposes, including hunting and target shooting. Nothing in this section limits an officer's authority to act in defense of the officer or another person to the same extent as any other person. The carrying or use of a firearm not addressed by this section is not, by itself, a violation of this policy. Any use of force by an officer is governed by Policy 400 Use of Force.

D. An officer's Massachusetts license to carry applies only within the Commonwealth. Under the Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act, 18 U.S.C. §926B, an officer who is authorized by the Department to carry a firearm, is current in the qualification standards of this policy and Policy 400 Use of Force, is not the subject of any disciplinary action by the Department that could result in suspension or loss of police powers, and carries Department-issued photographic identification may carry a concealed firearm in other states, subject to the limitations stated in that statute. Identification cards for retired officers under 18 U.S.C. §926C are governed by Policy 97 Retired Officer Identification Cards (LEOSA).

10. SPECIAL WEAPONS:

Unless authorized to be carried in a police vehicle at all times by the Chief of Police, special weapons, including shotguns, rifles, and other weapons listed as special weapons in Policy 93 Authorized Weapons and Ammunition, and ammunition for the same, shall be maintained in a secure area of the Department in accordance with Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.L.7.

When not carried in a patrol vehicle on routine patrol, special weapons shall be issued only with the knowledge and permission of the Chief of Police or their designee, and only to officers who have qualified with them or to authorized members of specially trained personnel.

11. INSPECTIONS:

A. Commanding Officers are responsible for ensuring that all firearms and ammunition issued to personnel assigned to their units are inspected semiannually, in conjunction with each firearms qualification cycle. The Commanding Officer shall ensure that any officer who did not attend a qualification session is inspected separately. The inspection shall include the mechanical condition of the firearm in accordance with the inspection procedures in Appendix A and the safety procedures in Appendix B, and verification that the ammunition is Department issue, in good condition, and carried in the correct quantity specified in Policy 93 Authorized Weapons and Ammunition.

B. The results of each inspection shall be entered on the designated firearms inspection form maintained by the Training Division. Inspection forms shall not be amended. Completed forms shall be sent through channels and forwarded to the Training Division no later than five days after completion of the inspection.

C. Any defect in any firearm or ammunition shall be corrected or replaced by the Training Division Armorer. Any improper ammunition shall be corrected during inspection and a report forwarded through channels. Firearms found to be dirty shall be cleaned prior to the officer returning to duty.

D. Firearms found to be unsafe or not functioning properly shall be handled in accordance with Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.L.6.

12. REPORTING AND POST-DISCHARGE PROCEDURES:

Any discharge of a firearm, other than a discharge for training, qualification, or recreational purposes authorized under Policy 400 Use of Force, Section IV.K.7.f, is a reportable use of force and shall be documented and reported in accordance with Policy 400 Use of Force, Sections IV.N and IV.O.

Whenever an officer discharges a firearm at or in the direction of a person, or any use of force results in death or serious bodily injury, the procedures of Policy 501 Officer Involved Shootings, In-Custody Deaths and Serious Uses of Force shall be followed, including securing the involved weapon, evidentiary chain of custody, officer support, and return-to-duty procedures.

APPENDIX A: INSPECTION PROCEDURE FOR SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOLS

1. Clear the weapon in accordance with the clearing procedure set forth in Appendix B.

2. Inspect the weapon for visual signs of debris or dirt, including the trigger guard and magazine well.

3. Inspect the sights and any mounted optic; check for looseness, damage, or missing components and ensure they are clean and visible.

4. Visually inspect the ejection port, paying close attention to the breech face, firing pin opening, and extractor. No foreign matter should be visible; if necessary, wipe clean with an applicator.

5. Check the feeding ramp on the barrel for buildup or foreign matter; if present, remove with an applicator.

6. Check the barrel for bulges, deformities, or fouling, and check the muzzle for chips or damage.

7. Release the slide using the slide release lever, checking the lever for function and looseness. Rack the action several times to check recoil spring tension; if friction is present, check for proper lubrication.

8. With the weapon's muzzle in the bullet trap and the slide forward, pull the trigger, feeling for release of the firing pin and checking for tension. Keeping the finger on the trigger, manually pull back the slide, feeling for trigger reset.

9. Lock the slide back and hand the weapon to the officer, allowing them to reload and re-holster the weapon per Department procedures.

10. When the weapon is safely holstered, inspect the magazines for deformed edges and loose base plates, and press on the rounds in the magazine checking for slight movement indicating the magazine has not been overloaded. Check indicator holes to confirm round count. Before returning the magazine, seat the rounds for proper function.

11. Using the designated inspection form, make notations and inform the Training Division Armorer if any weapon needs repair or replacement.

12. The inspecting officer shall inform the officer whether the weapon passes or fails inspection, recommending remedial action if needed.

APPENDIX B: SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR INSPECTIONS

1. The use of bullet traps is mandatory when clearing weapons, and a safe clearing area shall be designated by an inspecting officer. It is recommended that two officers or officials conduct the inspection where possible.

2. One officer at a time shall be instructed to clear their weapon upon command of the inspecting officer, with clear instructions issued on how the procedure is to be done.

3. The clearing procedure shall be conducted consistent with training, in the following order:

a. The officer steps into the clearing area with the inspecting officer slightly behind them on their weapon side.

b. The officer removes the magazine from the weapon and places it in their pocket.

c. Upon command, the officer removes the weapon from the holster and places the muzzle into the aperture of the bullet trap.

d. The slide is pulled back, extracting the round from the chamber, repeated three times.

e. The slide is locked back and the officer physically and visually inspects the chamber before handing the weapon over to be inspected. While the weapon is being inspected, the officer may retrieve the extracted round.

f. When the inspection is finished, the weapon is handed back to the officer with the slide open and is immediately placed muzzle first into the bullet trap.

g. The officer inserts the magazine and releases the slide, chambering a round. The weapon is placed back into the holster and the magazine is then removed, allowing the officer to place the last round into it, completing the procedure.

h. It is recommended that each officer rotate a magazine from their carrier and reload the duty pistol with a fresh magazine at each inspection.

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

August 14, 2026–

Consolidates and supersedes Policy 400.7 Firearms Guidelines (December 2, 2015) and the firearm and ammunition inspection provisions of Policy 405.1 Firearm and Personal Protective Equipment Inspections (February 3, 2025). Issued as Policy 400.1; the former Policy 400.1 Handcuffs and Restraints Guidelines is superseded by Policy 400.2 Less Lethal Weapons and Restraints Guidelines. Removed and cross-referenced rather than reproduced: deadly force authorization, vehicle discharge, warning shots, weapons security and storage, weapons restrictions, and qualification and training, to Policy 400 Use of Force; authorized firearms and ammunition and weapon maintenance and accountability, to Policy 93 Authorized Weapons and Ammunition; and post-discharge investigation, officer wellness, and return to duty, to Policy 501 Officer Involved Shootings, In-Custody Deaths and Serious Uses of Force. Added authorization for non-sworn Animal Control personnel to carry a Department issued firearm, including use against an animal. Added prohibitions on carrying a backup or secondary firearm on duty and on altering or modifying any firearm, ammunition, or firearm-related equipment without the express permission of the Chief of Police. Added concealed carry in other states under 18 U.S.C. §926B and its conditions. Added a carve-out for a firearm carried solely in a private capacity under the officer's own license to carry or used solely for recreational or sporting purposes. Removed indemnification representations, the written examination requirement, and departmental authorization of off-duty weapons other than the issued service weapon, together with the associated approval, registration, holster, and off-duty proficiency provisions. Replaced monthly firearm and ammunition inspection with semiannual inspection aligned to the firearms qualification cycles. Assigned special weapons issuance authority to the Chief of Police or their designee.

Original Issue Date: September 3, 1993 (as Policy 450, Use of Firearms)