



# ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures – 3.22 Forcible Entry



### FORCIBLE ENTRY

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Effective: October 8, 2021  
 Scheduled Review: October 8, 2024  
 Approved: Fire Chief Mike Kennedy

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#### I. PURPOSE

To assist personnel in the selection of proper tools and techniques utilized to gain access into locked vehicles and residential and commercial structures when operating at the scene of a fire, medical emergency, automatic alarm, or a reasonable suspicion exists that an emergency may be taking place.

The State of Michigan grants fire departments broad legal power under State law ([1941 PA 207](#)) to investigate hazardous conditions without a search warrant or U.S. Constitution 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment violation.

#### II. SIZE-UP CONSIDERATIONS

**Try Before You Try** - All exterior doors shall be checked prior to forcible entry of any type, and repeated knocking attempts shall be made on all doors when time and nature of the emergency permits.

**Entry by Default** - If personnel are summoned to the scene of a potential fire, medical emergency, automatic alarm, or a reasonable suspicion exists as reported by a credible source and the structure or room containing the possible emergency is locked, personnel will be responsible for gaining access to the inside of the building or room to investigate. Unless all areas of the building can be checked from the exterior of the building and verified through visualization of all rooms, e.g., closets, bathrooms, stockrooms, break rooms, bedrooms, basements, cellars, then entry shall be made to verify the reported emergency or incident.

**Knox-Boxes and Residential Lock-Boxes** - Key-safes such as Knox-Boxes and residential lock-boxes are the preferred method of entry in all situations where they are available. The use of key-safes is simultaneously the fastest method of entry and the one that it is the least damaging method to use. This is sometimes called “non-destructive rapid entry” and is preferred over forcible entry of any type. Be aware that just because a home or building has a lock-box mounted on it, that does not necessarily mean that it contains keys or that the keys it contains will open all or any of the building’s exterior or interior locks.

**Key-Holders** - If the nature of the incident allows, the incident commander shall request that Central Fire Dispatch contact with a key-holder and have them respond. If the dispatcher cannot contact a key-holder or if the key-holder’s estimated time of arrival is in excess of sixty (60) minutes, the incident commander shall determine whether to make entry without further delay or to wait for the key-holder. It may be helpful for the incident commander to contact the key-holder directly and explain the situation in an attempt to obtain permission to make entry. Forcing entry is generally to be avoided when a key-holder is contactable but tying up an apparatus for an indefinite amount of time waiting for a key-holder with an extended response is also unacceptable.



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### III. VEHICLE FORCIBLE ENTRY

Firefighters will conduct non-destructive or destructive forcible entry into vehicles or other modes of transportation if an infant, child, handicapped or incapacitated person, or animal is locked inside the vehicle and a life threatening, or risk of injury, condition exists.

### IV. LIABILITY

If the property or vehicle owner (or responsible party) is on the scene, personnel will advise them of the following prior to forcing entry:

- A. The potential for an undetermined amount of property damage, depending on the force required. It should be remembered, however, that the majority of incidents do not justify indiscriminate damage in order to gain entry into a secured dwelling or vehicle.
- B. The City is not responsible for any damage that results from forcing entry into the vehicle or dwelling.
- C. If the property or vehicle owner (or responsible party) is on the scene and it is not a situation requiring immediate forcible entry, personnel will obtain verbal consent prior to forcing entry.
- D. Anyone requesting assistance for non-emergency lockouts will be referred to a locksmith or other private enterprise, as appropriate. Personnel will not recommend a specific vendor.

Personnel shall make a reasonable attempt to determine vehicle or property ownership and responsibility or residence prior to forcing entry into a vehicle or dwelling.

### V. FORCIBLE ENTRY

At incidents where the severity of the emergency cannot be verified from the exterior, priority will be given to further scene size-up and the use of through-the-lock and/or other minimally-destructive methods. Cost to repair the structure will be the priority over the speed of entry.

Excluding fires, in all situations where forcible entry is deemed necessary, the incident commander shall request the response of law enforcement for the safety fire personnel. Unless the safety of fire crews is in doubt, entry need not be delayed waiting for police arrival, but the request shall be made prior to making entry to at least hasten their arrival.

Entry Decision - The exterior investigation and size-up of the scene shall continue until the incident commander determines that forcible entry must be made, and orders fire crews to force entry. Except in instances of an obvious working fire, crews will await the order to force entry from the incident commander.

Entry Priorities: Speed vs. Cost - In most situations, there are two priorities of entry: speed and cost. In verified emergencies, or where there is a reasonable suspicion that an emergency condition exists that is immediately threatening to life or limb or where major property damage can result, the priority of entry will be given to those methods which will generate the fastest entry. Regardless of damage to the building, speed of entry will be the priority over other considerations.



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Window Entry - Entry through windows at the scene of locked-door medical calls and welfare checks can be dangerous. Residents who are not expecting first responders to break into their home are doubly not expecting them come in through a window. The public expects burglars and other criminals to use a window as a mode of entry, not first responders. Firefighters who have entered through windows have sometimes found themselves face to face with an armed resident or with an aggressive dog and no easy way to back out again. Firefighters shall not make entry into windows during non-fire incidents, even if they are unlocked or open, UNLESS positive voice contact can be made with a resident inside.

Announcing Entry - After the door or other entry-point has been opened, and prior to stepping into the building, fire crews will announce their presence by loudly identifying themselves as fire department members to any potential person or persons inside the structure. Fire crews shall continue to announce their presence as they investigate the interior of a structure until such time that an occupant is found or the building is found to be unoccupied.

Apparatus Emergency Lights - Prior to forcing entry into a residential structure where contact cannot be made with the occupant, apparatus operators shall turn on their emergency flashing lights. This can help to quickly identify fire crews as first responders to someone inside the structure.

### VI. WELFARE CHECKS

If the fire department receives the call for a welfare check from a person not on site, the fire department shall wait for law enforcement prior to forcing entry and entering the structure.

While forcing entry, the company officer shall ensure the minimum amount of personnel and equipment are utilized to successfully perform the task. Other personnel not directly involved should attempt to position themselves behind cover. (Cover - A strategic position which offers protection from gun fire/blast effect. Cover is a dynamic term depending on the weapons system. What might offer cover from a handgun might not defeat the threat from a rifle. Concealment should be utilized if cover is not available. (Concealment - A position which offers being hidden from view but does not offer protection from ballistic threats.)

For welfare checks, never enter a home without the resident's knowledge; allow the police to "clear" the structure first. This will avoid misidentification by residents who are caught off guard and react defensively, potentially causing harm to personnel. Depending on the situation, the donning of ballistic protection is strongly advised.

### VII. FIRE AND FLOW-PATH

While operating at the scene of a working fire, consideration shall be given to possible changes in the fire's flow-path caused by forcing entry. If avoidable, glass doors should not be broken out and doors should not be removed from their hinges as these techniques will change the flow-path and feed the fire additional oxygen without being able to easily close the door again. Doors that are opened by conventional prying or other means shall be temporarily re-shut if entry of the attack-crew is delayed or expected to be delayed.



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This can be accomplished without the danger of the door re-locking by closing the door on a tool, such as a Halligan or axe.

### **VIII. RESECURING THE STRUCTURE**

At no time shall the department force entry and leave a dwelling or vehicle unsecured without notification to a property representative and/or law enforcement. A board-up company shall be requested to secure the structure as an option of last resort. If a board-up company is requested, battalion chief needs to be immediately notified of the situation.

### **IX. PROPERTY ENTRY AFTER LEAVING**

If personnel leave an incident and for whatever reason there is a need to re-enter, permission (preferably written) from the property owner or a search warrant needs to be obtained. If there is a rekindle of a fire, this does not apply. In these re-entry cases, the battalion chief needs to be immediately notified of the situation.