

ESCAMBIA COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE

Standard Operating Guidelines

4100.040

Forcible Entry

Implemented: 05/13/09

Revised: 12/18/17



Paul Williams, Fire Chief

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PURPOSE:

Establish guidelines for gaining entry into private residences and commercial buildings for fire alarms, citizen assist, lockouts, lock ins and assistance to Emergency Medical Services and other agencies.

OBJECTIVE:

To provide personnel with guidelines that give a clear delineation as to when forcible entry should be used to gain access to investigate or mitigate dangerous situations.

SCOPE:

All Personnel

FORCIBLE ENTRY CRITERIA

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES, CITIZEN ASSIST (1ST PARTY CONTACT)

This section applies when there is phone or verbal contact with the patient/occupant needing assistance only. Escambia County Fire Rescue (ECFR) shall be the lead agency responsible for determining the need to force entry, based on the patient information and the priority assigned by the Communications Center. Should forced entry be needed, it will be the fire department OIC's responsibility to confirm the address and determine the best and least destructive method to gain entry. As personnel make entry, they will move slowly and carefully, announcing loudly "fire department" as they enter each room. If confronted with a threat, crews will attempt to retreat to safety and notify law enforcement. If unable, they shall activate the emergency button on their radio.

MEDICAL ALARMS, OR WELFARE CHECK (NO 1ST PARTY CONTACT)

This section applies when there is no phone or verbal contact with the patient/occupant possibly needing assistance. The Escambia County Sheriff's Office (ECSO) will be the lead agency responsible for determining the need to force entry, based on the information they obtain. Should the ECSO request fire rescue to force entry it will be the fire department OIC's responsibility to determine the best and least destructive method to gain entry. Once there is a path for entry, the ECSO shall enter the home to determine if it is safe and if an emergency exists.

FIRE ALARM ACTIVATIONS

The Incident Commander shall make every effort to confirm or rule out the presence of smoke or other accurate indicators of a fire before a forcible entry operation is initiated. A chief officer shall be contacted whenever a forcible entry situation arises and should respond to the scene. Doors or windows that are hot to the touch, smoke blackened windows, cracked windows, smoke showing from construction openings,

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vents, eaves are all examples of reliable indicators of a potential fire condition. A thermal imaging camera shall be utilized, if available, to help determine the presence of a fire and the need to force entry. Key holder contact should be established whenever possible and patience must be exercised unless a true emergency exists.

LOCK OUTS

The Incident Commander is responsible to determine the need for forcible entry when persons have either locked themselves in or locked themselves out and cannot exit or enter in a timely manner. If non-emergency conditions exist a locksmith should be used rather than fire department making forced entry and thus becoming liable for damages.

ASSISTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

Occasionally, law enforcement agencies will request the fire department for forcible entry. If a law enforcement agency requests the services of ECFR for forcible entry or ladder access to a crime scene or a potentially violent situation, responding ECFR units will stage at the designated safe staging area and the fire department Incident Commander shall inform the law enforcement Incident Commander that we will provide them with the necessary tools to gain access, but fire department members will not put themselves in harms' way. The fire department will provide the law enforcement officers with a brief explanation and training of how to properly use the tools to accomplish successful entry.

KNOX BOX

ECFR encourages all business to take part in this endeavor to reduce the damage to the structure. The search of the exterior portion of the structure near the main entrance must be completed by the first responding units prior to any consideration or attempt of forcible entry is made. If a Knox Box is located use this device to gain entry into the structure. Please notify the building owner as soon as possible and return the key to the box after making sure the structure is secure.

OPERATIONS

The gravity of the situation should always dictate the prescribed actions. Common sense should prevail. As always, "Try Before You Pry." Look for the safest, quickest, least invasive means to gain entry; once it's been determined that forcible entry is required. Check all windows to determine if they are locked or unlocked. Consider removing hinges if there are doors with the hinges exposed. If breaking a small, single pane of glass will give you clear access to all locks, that method should receive careful consideration. If a "Through the lock" method is employed, consider using channel locks to carefully screw the cylinder out of the threads in order to keep the threads and the lock intact. If the situation dictates a quicker access, then use an "A" or "Rex" tool, a "K" tool or an "R" tool to rapidly pull the cylinder from the door. Once the cylinder has been removed, then use the "Kerry" key to turn the cogs,

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which are set at either the “7:00 o’clock” or the “5 o’clock” position. It’s important to consider that use of any of the “pulling” tools may irreparably damage an aluminum doorframe and breaking the glass may be the more cost-effective approach. Always try to use the least invasive forcible entry method if possible. Exhaustive communication should be practiced whenever possible. Check with neighbors, under doormats and under nearby planters to try to find a workable key if time permits.

NOTIFICATIONS

The assigned on-duty Battalion Chief shall always be notified prior to forcing entry into any structure and/or vehicle.

Law enforcement (ECSO) shall only be notified under the following situations;

- If a request has been made to gain entry as a “lock out” has occurred and the OIC is requesting the ECSO to confirm identity and residence.
- If any extenuating circumstances exist that the OIC believes law enforcement is needed.