

Part 7 - Methods for searching places and vehicles

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Executive summary

Key things to note:

- When planning searches, define the objective(s) and consider all known factors to decide on the best course of action.
- Be careful, methodical and tidy, so that you do not overlook items or make mistakes in recording and labelling them.
- Have respect for the premises and property - remember that you are dealing with someone else's personal possessions.
- If you have to search at night, make a further examination in daylight.
- When appropriate, (e.g. when the search may change or damage the appearance of the area) photograph / video the area before beginning the search. Photograph the scene again when the search is complete.
- Clearly mark or sign areas that have been properly searched.
- Accurately mark the position of seized things on a map (sketch plan) and label the item with identifying details.

Overview

Purpose

This part of the '[Search](#)' chapter describes various methods that can be used for carrying out searches of:

- outdoor spaces, including open areas, roadsides, water
- the interior and exterior of premises
- vehicles and transport facilities.

It also outlines general procedures for planning searches (mainly outdoor searches) including:

- defining objectives
- making a reconnaissance and/ or appreciation
- briefing searchers.

See related information below for links to more specific procedures involving search powers and evidential searches.

Examples of when the search methods can be applied

The methods described can be used for any type of search and for any purpose, including searches:

- carried out by way of search warrant or warrantless search powers under the [Search and Surveillance Act 2012](#)
- of crime scenes and other evidential searches
- for missing persons, suspects etc.

Related information

More specific information and procedures is found in in these chapters:

- [Carrying out search powers with or without warrant](#) includes information about:
 - risk assessment when planning searches
 - separating individuals posing risk from premises to be searched
 - procedure for planning searches
 - mandatory notifications
 - entry procedures
- [Crime scene examination](#) (covers such things as preserving evidence and evidence integrity and decontamination zones)
- [Searching people](#)
- [Improvised explosive devices and bomb threats](#)
- [Control and command](#)
- '[Search \(for bodies of homicide victims\)](#)' in the '[Homicide and serious crime investigations](#)' chapter.

Planning and conducting a search

General search processes outlined

The process outlined in this table applies generally to all searches. However, some modifications may be required depending on the nature and purpose of the search, e.g. when search powers (with or without warrant) are being exercised, or the search is to locate evidential material at crime scenes or a missing person.

Step	Action
1	Define the objective when assigning the task.
2	Make a reconnaissance unless time is critical. If there is no time for a reconnaissance, obtain advice and guidance from a person familiar with the area.
3	Make an appreciation considering all known factors to decide on the best course of action.
4	<p>Make a plan which must include an organisation chart. It must also specify the method of search. See Search methods (mainly outdoors).</p> <p>If the search involves the exercise of search powers, see 'Carrying out search powers with or without warrant' for information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - risk assessment when planning searches - separating individuals posing risk from premises to be searched - procedure for planning searches - mandatory notifications - entry procedures.
5	Ensure that you have sufficient tools and equipment.
6	<p>Brief searchers and support staff. They must know the background to the search, what is happening, and what is required of them.</p> <p>See 'Operations Orders' in 'Part 2 - Planning, control and command' of the 'Control and command' chapter.</p> <p>Note: Except during searches for dangerous escapees or offenders, formal Orders Groups are seldom held.</p>
7	When the team leaders arrive at the search scene, brief them on the search area, topography and boundaries. Team leaders then assemble their sections, draw the necessary equipment and move to their search areas.
8	<p>Depending on the method of search, the team may, on reaching its position, start searching, lay out boundary markers or await the search controller's instructions.</p> <p>As each team searches, the team leader must record the areas searched, and who has searched them.</p>
9	If necessary, consider whether the services of the ' Specialist Search Group ' should be deployed.

Defining the objective

When assigning the task, tell the operation commander or O/C scene:

- the reason for the search
- exactly what things or people are sought
- the time-lapse, and any causes of delay
- the location, area and boundaries of the search
- limitations in human resources, time, security or logistics.

Making a reconnaissance

Unless time is critical, make a reconnaissance to establish:

- size of the area
- type of terrain
- obstacles or features requiring specialist personnel or equipment, such as cliffs, rivers, swamps or caves
- hazards requiring safety precautions
- possible sites for observation points, search headquarters and base
- access for transport
- any security problems.

Establishing a radio listening post will enable you to act quickly on information gained.

The reconnaissance can be on foot, or in a vehicle or aircraft. [Helicopters](#) are especially useful because they can hover, carry out low-level reconnaissance and land almost anywhere. If you are working on foot, you can use dogs. They may rapidly find evidence that will remove the need for a full-scale search. Choose the method that best meets the needs of the operation and the availability of time.

Making an appreciation

Consider:

- the location
- the thing or person sought
- terrain and any hazards
- priorities
- time factors, such as:
 - if you are searching for a person, how long they have been in the open
 - daylight hours available
 - whether temporary lighting is possible
 - the time available for the search
 - travel time to the scene
 - the time required for briefings and Orders Groups (See 'Operations Orders' in '[Part 2 - Planning control and command](#)' of the '[Control and command](#)' chapter)
- climatic conditions and weather forecast
- human resources required, and their level of expertise
- water and toilet facilities
- safety and security
- morale
- administration and logistics, including:
 - communications
 - accommodation
 - catering
 - transport
 - maps
 - equipment
- any other operational requirements.

Briefing

The briefing provides an opportunity for the search controller to motivate the search teams and should include:

- reason for the search
- the item or person sought

- search method
- what to do on finding the item or person
- degree of confidentiality
- expected duration of the search
- composition of the search teams
- command structure
- hours of duty
- what to wear
- logistics, such as catering, accommodation and transport.

Ensuring evidence is not overlooked

This table provides guiding principles for searches generally to ensure evidence is not overlooked.

Step	Action
1	Be careful, methodical and tidy, so that you do not overlook items or make mistakes in recording and labelling them. Have respect for the premises and property - remember that you are dealing with someone else's personal possessions.
2	For more effective control and results, use a minimum number of enforcement officers or assistants. This will minimise distractions and help to prevent evidence being overlooked.
3	Do not search at night. If this is unavoidable, make a further examination in daylight.
4	In appropriate situations, consider photographing the area before beginning the search. This is particularly important when the search may change or damage the appearance of the area. Ensure that everything is photographed, and consider using a video camera. When the search is complete, photograph the scene again.
5	Once the search is finished, consider repeating it, allocating different areas to different enforcement officers or assistants.
6	When supervisors are satisfied that an area has been properly searched, they should withdraw their team, mark the area with a sign or other mark such as emergency tape or chalk, and advise the assigned officer in charge of 'Search Control'.
7	When a thing is found and is to be seized, mark its position on a map (sketch plan) by recording its distance from a fixed point. The thing can then be accurately re-placed for any reconstruction. When it is moved or seized, it must be labelled with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - its description - where it was found - who found it - the date and time of discovery.

Specialist Search Group

Specialist Search Teams forming part of the Specialist Search Group (SSG) have been established in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to provide specialist support to general police.

The teams' primary role is to search for improvised explosive devices and other dangerous items or substances. However, their training and equipment enable them to be deployed in other contexts, such as crime scene examinations, exhibit recovery and 'booby-trapped' cannabis plantations. They are experienced in searching vehicles, aircraft and vessels.

To achieve maximum efficiency, ordinary Police employees must first, where practical, follow the procedures in this chapter. For detailed information about when specialist search teams may be deployed and the services they can provide, refer to the [Specialist Search Group](#) chapter.

Search methods (mainly outdoors)

Introduction

The information in this topic focuses mainly on outdoor searches. See also the '[Crime scene examination](#)' chapter, particularly for indoor searches.

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Searching premises

Preparing to search

Obtain information about the layout of the premises. If you are searching a large building, ask maintenance personnel, janitors and supervisors. Also obtain building and utilities plans, and keys to locked areas, rooms and facilities.

For crime scene searches:

- When a detailed search of a total area is not required, consider starting the search from the outside boundary of the property, and following the offender's route, working systematically and methodically towards the point of entry.
- Remember that searching for evidence can destroy other evidence. Set priorities and determine the sequence that the search will take.

Searching for items

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The exterior

Follow these steps when searching the exterior.

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Searching open areas

Searching for items

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Searching water

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Searching for suspects

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Searching for missing persons

Conduct a [reconnaissance search](#) in the area where the missing person might be found, including main tracks and routes, peaks, ridges, valleys, rivers, camp sites and huts. Any evidence of the person's whereabouts will indicate an "area of probability" for a general search.

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Searching motor vehicles, ships and aircraft

Searching motor vehicles

This topic applies the same meaning of 'motor vehicles' as in section [2](#) of the Land Transport Act 1998, namely it means:

- a vehicle drawn or propelled by mechanical power; and
- includes a trailer; but
- does not include a:
 - vehicle running on rails; or
 - trailer (other than a trailer designed solely for the carriage of goods) that is designed and used exclusively as part of the armament of the New Zealand Defence Force; or
 - trailer running on one wheel and designed exclusively as a speed measuring device or for testing the wear of vehicle tyres; or
 - vehicle designed for amusement purposes and used exclusively within a place of recreation, amusement, or entertainment to which the public does not have access with motor vehicles; or
 - pedestrian-controlled machine; or
 - vehicle that the LTA has declared under section [168A](#) is not a motor vehicle; or
 - mobility device.

Search areas

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Searching procedures

Follow these steps to search a motor vehicle.

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Searching ships

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Searching aircraft

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