



# GENERAL ORDER

## GENERAL ORDER 300.05

### Structure/Vehicle Entry

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES BUREAU

Issue Date: January 25, 1999

Revision Date: January 07, 2020

1

#### APPLICABILITY

2 All Operational Personnel

3

#### POLICY

4 The Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services (Department) shall make entry  
 5 into locked structures and/or vehicles when the incident is deemed an emergency and entry is  
 6 deemed necessary by either the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Emergency Dispatcher  
 7 personnel (Howard) or the company officer. Non-emergency entry is only authorized after the  
 8 individual requesting entry has given consent and Department personnel have verified the  
 9 individual has the right to authorize emergency personnel to access the structure/vehicle.  
 10 Additionally, the individual must be made fully aware of possible resulting damage to the  
 11 structure/vehicle, and the individual making this request must sign proper authorization  
 12 releasing the Department from responsibility for any resulting damage. Entry into certain areas  
 13 has the potential to implicate the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which  
 14 requires a warrant be obtained or a warrantless exception to exist. The only two applicable  
 15 exceptions for Department personnel are when emergency situations exist that require  
 16 immediate action to prevent imminent harm or appropriate consent is obtained.

17

#### DEFINITIONS

18 ➤ None

19

#### PROCEDURES

##### 20 GENERAL:

21 The Department shall make entry into locked structures and vehicles during emergency  
 22 situations when necessary to abate the emergency. Company officer discretion may be used  
 23 when attempting to comply with a citizen request for non-emergency entry after obtaining the  
 24 appropriate consent and verification of the individual’s right to authorize access the property.

25  
 26 A “risk versus benefit” evaluation to include life safety, incident stabilization, and property  
 27 conservation shall always be performed prior to making the decision to make entry into any  
 28 structure or vehicle. As with any type of emergency incident, maintaining situational awareness  
 29 is paramount.



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30 When the PSAP is taking a 911 call for request for fire or EMS service, and there is a **known or**  
31 **suspected** need for forced entry, they will do the following:

- 32 • Ask the caller “are there any unsecured weapons in the residence?” after all other EMD  
33 questions have been asked, and note (yes or nor) in the call history.
- 34 • Add the Howard County Police Department (HCPD) to the call if the answer is yes.
- 35 • Advise Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) units to stage and await the arrival of  
36 the Howard County Police Department (HCPD) if the answer is yes.

37

### 38 **GUIDELINES FOR ENTRY DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS:**

39 Emergency situations include, but are not limited to:

- 40 • Occupants, whether human or animal, of the locked structure/vehicle are believed to be  
41 in imminent danger.
- 42 • Occupants, whether human or animal, of the locked structure/vehicle are believed to be  
43 in need of immediate medical attention.
- 44 • Unattended food on an operating cooking appliance in a locked structure.
- 45 • Gas leaks, odor of gas, or broken water pipes in a locked structure.
- 46 • Other conditions in which imminent danger to life, property and/or environment exists.

47

48 Howard shall immediately dispatch Department personnel and equipment to the scene of the  
49 emergency. For EMS incidents or welfare checks, where entry to a structure or vehicle is  
50 encountered or anticipated, a suppression unit will be dispatched in addition to the transport  
51 unit.

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53 Howard shall request police assistance to the scene of the emergency when forced entry is  
54 anticipated.

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56 The HCPD has the responsibility of requesting the response of an animal control officer to an  
57 emergency scene involving an animal when forced entry is anticipated.

58

59 Entry in emergency situations is authorized only to the extent necessary to mitigate the  
60 identified hazard:

- 61 • Entry attempts should be restricted to those actions which are not likely to cause bodily  
62 injury to the endangered citizen, Department personnel, or bystanders.
- 63 • Entry attempts should be restricted to those actions which will cause the least amount  
64 of property damage to the structure/vehicle.
- 65 • For **structure** entries for an unknown emergency (no smoke/fire evident, welfare check,  
66 etc.), if the caller is unable to be re-contacted by Howard (or not on the line with them),  
67 or if the call was received from a third party (on the scene, or not in the area), the  
68 following shall be considered:
  - 69 ○ Personnel will make every attempt to raise the occupant by knocking and/or  
70 ringing the doorbell with clear and repeated announcements of: “Fire & Rescue,  
71 we are here to help.” When knocking, personnel should position themselves to  
72 the side of the door and not in front of windows.



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- 73 ○ If dispatch was for a transport unit only, and forcible entry is discovered to be a
- 74 possibility, a suppression unit shall be dispatched by Howard.
- 75 ○ Continue to have Howard try to contact the occupant or caller.
- 76 ○ Ensure police assistance is enroute or on scene (emergency response).
- 77 ○ Determine if any neighbors have information on the occupant.
- 78 ○ Conduct a 360 examination of the property, knocking and announcing. When
- 79 knocking, remember the proper position is to the side of the door and not in
- 80 front of windows.

- 81
- 82 ● If forcible entry is required, personnel shall continue to announce their presence. When
- 83 present, police shall enter and “clear” ahead of Department personnel.
- 84

## 85 GUIDELINES FOR ENTRY DURING NON-EMERGENCY SITUATIONS:

86 Prior to attempting entry during a non-emergency situation, Department personnel must  
87 obtain the necessary consent and verification from the individual with the authority to allow  
88 the Department a right of entry into the structure or vehicle, as described below on line 125.

89 Non-emergency situations include, but are not limited to:

- 90 ● Occupants, whether human or animal, of the locked structure/vehicle are not in
- 91 imminent danger because of length of confinement, time of day, weather conditions,
- 92 etc.
- 93 ● Occupants, whether human or animal, of the locked structure/vehicle do not appear to
- 94 be in need of immediate medical assistance.
- 95 ● Other conditions in which no imminent danger exists to life, property, or environment.
- 96

97 Howard shall dispatch Department personnel and equipment to the scene for customer  
98 assistance. Department response to the scene shall be non-emergency.

99

100 Howard shall request police assistance to the non-emergency scene for citizen assistance when  
101 forced entry is anticipated.

102

103 The HCPD has the responsibility of requesting the response of an animal control officer to the  
104 non-emergency scene involving a trapped animal.

105

106 Entry in non-emergency situations is authorized only to the extent necessary to mitigate the  
107 situation:

- 108 ● Entry attempts should be restricted to those actions which are not likely to cause bodily
- 109 injury to the endangered citizen, Department personnel, or bystanders.
- 110 ● Entry attempts should be restricted to those actions that will cause the least amount of
- 111 property damage to the structure/vehicle.
- 112 ○ Consider ladder use to upper floors for access points to structures.
- 113

114 Department personnel and equipment shall remain in an in-service status during the non-  
115 emergency entry attempts; thus, these units are available and may be dispatched from the  
116 scene of the customer assistance to the location of an emergency.



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- The company officer shall explain to the individual requesting assistance that Department personnel could be dispatched from this scene to an emergency prior to completing the non-emergency customer assistance. If the apparatus is dispatched before completion of the non-emergency entry, the company officer shall advise the citizen how to continue with the entry attempts and inform the individual that Departmental personnel will return to the scene upon completion of the emergency call.

125 PRIOR to proceeding with entry in a non-emergency situation, the responding company officer

126 MUST confirm or have reasonable belief that the citizen requesting non-emergency entry into a

127 locked structure/vehicle is the owner/authorized user of the structure/vehicle.

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- Confirmation may be accomplished via the citizen's driver's license, police cross-reference of citizen name and vehicle license plate number in the absence of a driver's license, or some other reliable identification method.
  - If confirmation of the person's identity cannot be obtained prior to the non-emergency entry attempts, such as if the individual's identification is within the locked structure or vehicle, it must be obtained upon completion of the entry and before leaving the scene. Reasons for the delayed confirmation shall be noted by the company officer on the Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry Assistance. (Attachment A)

136

137 PRIOR to proceeding with entry in a non-emergency situation, the responding company officer

138 MUST evaluate the potential for property damage. This evaluation includes, but is not limited

139 to:

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- Advising the owner/authorized user of the locked structure/vehicle that Department personnel are not trained as locksmiths and techniques for entry used by Department personnel are those preferred in emergency operations and will very likely result in damage to the locked structure/vehicle; and,
  - Advising the owner/authorized user of the locked structure/vehicle of the other less intrusive methods of gaining entry (i.e.: contacting a locksmith, retrieving an extra key if available, having another vehicle key cut by the car dealership, etc.).

147

148 PRIOR to proceeding with entry in a non-emergency situation, the responding company officer

149 MUST have the owner/authorized user of the locked structure/vehicle complete and sign the

150 Authorization and Hold Harmless Agreement section of the Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry

151 Assistance form which releases Department personnel from responsibility for any resulting

152 damage. (Attachment A)

153

154 **PROCEDURES FOR AFTER ENTRY IS GAINED:**

155 The Howard County Police Department will not routinely provide security stand-by at the

156 structure after forced entry by Department personnel.

- 157
- 158 PRIOR to clearing the scene, the responding company officer SHALL:
- 159
- 160
- Exhaust all means possible to make contact with the property owner, family members of the owner or property manager to assume responsibility of the structure.



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- 161 • The suppression company should attempt to secure the property before leaving the
- 162 scene.
- 163 • If the suppression company cannot re-secure the structure then the company officer
- 164 shall contact the shift Battalion Chief to obtain authorization to use a contractor from
- 165 the Emergency Property Repair Contractors List to secure the structure.
- 166 • After obtaining approval from the shift Battalion Chief, the company officer shall contact
- 167 Howard via radio and have them contact a contractor from the Emergency Property
- 168 Repair Contractors List. The suppression company shall remain on-scene out of service
- 169 until the contractor arrives and can assume responsibility for the structure. Before
- 170 leaving the scene, the company officer shall leave pertinent contact information for the
- 171 homeowner when they return. (Attachment B)
- 172 • If Howard advises the contractor has an ETA of greater than 60 minutes or if you have
- 173 waited on scene for 60 minutes, have Howard contact Special Operations (SO) to assist
- 174 with securing the structure. The suppression company will remain on scene until the
- 175 arrival of SO.
- 176 • Ensure a completed Entry form is posted for the structure. (Attachment B)

## REPORTING PROCEDURES:

178 The top half of the Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry form must be completed for each entry.

180  
181 The authority for entry shall be recorded for each entry attempt. For emergency entries, a  
182 description of the emergency shall be provided to include the exigent circumstances that  
183 provide the reason for the forced entry. For non-emergency entries, the manner in which the  
184 person’s authority to allow entry into the structure/vehicle was verified shall also be recorded.

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186 The bottom half of the Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry form must be completed for all non-  
187 emergency entries.

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189 The original of the Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry form, including the signed Authorization  
190 and Hold Harmless Agreement in the case of a non-emergency entry, shall be forwarded by the  
191 company officer to Department headquarters to be kept on file for 3 years.

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193 A copy of the completed Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry form, including the signed  
194 Authorization and Hold Harmless Agreement when applicable, shall be provided to the citizen  
195 requesting assistance.

## REFERENCES

- 197 • None

## SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT CHANGES

- 199 Updated to include considerations for entry and personnel safety.
- 200 Updated to include procedure for securing the structure if it cannot be secured.



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201 **FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

- 202 • Attachment A: Report of Structure/Vehicle Entry Assistance form
- 203 • Attachment B: Entry form

204 **APPROVED**

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# Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services GENERAL ORDER

## Attachment A

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### REPORT OF STRUCTURE/VEHICLE ENTRY ASSISTANCE

9 Emergency Entry Date \_\_\_\_\_  
9 Non-Emergency Entry Incident # (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Authority for entry: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9 Structure Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9 Vehicle Make: \_\_\_\_\_ Model: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Tag State: \_\_\_\_\_ Tag No.: \_\_\_\_\_

### AUTHORIZATION AND HOLD HARMLESS AGREEMENT (Non-emergency entry)

I, as the owner/authorized user of the above listed property, hereby affirm that I am authorized to enter the structure/vehicle described above. I have requested assistance to gain access to the structure/vehicle and understand that damage may result to the structure/vehicle as a result of the efforts to gain access. Resulting damages may include, but are not limited to, broken locking mechanisms, broken doors and surrounding areas, broken windows, etc. I agree to assume all responsibility for such damages and expressly request and authorize the assistance of HCFR personnel with full knowledge that such damages may occur. I understand that HCFR personnel are not trained as locksmiths and will use emergency entry techniques. I affirm that I have been advised of alternate, less intrusive entry procedures, but I have declined to pursue any of those methods. I hereby agree to hold harmless Howard County, its agencies, and all agents of Howard County for damages resulting from their assistance in attempting to gain access. I hereby release all such entities and persons from all criminal and civil liability and from all claims for personal injury or property damage and from all other claims whatsoever arising out of their efforts to assist.

REQUESTING PARTY: \_\_\_\_\_ WITNESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date Signature Date

Print Name Address, Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

WHITE - HCFR copy Signature/ID, Reporting Officer  
YELLOW - Citizen copy

*Structure/Vehicle Entry Assistance Attachment A*

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Attachment B

## HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

The Department of Fire and Rescue has made entry into your residence during an emergency incident. We have made every effort to make nondestructive entry and re secure your property.

**If you have questions, please call 410-313-6000**

**Or**

Visit <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/RiskManagement> to fill out an online incident form.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
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