

	HARRISONBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT		Policy Number:
	General Orders		415
	Chapter:	Field Operations	Total Pages:
	Section:	Response to Bomb Calls	Issue Date: 02/04/2025
	Issued By:	Rod Pollard, Interim Chief of Police	Effective Date: 01/04/2023
Replaces: All General Orders Previously Issued Relative to Subject			
VALEAC Standards: OPR.05.01 (f)			

A. POLICY AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to assist members of the Harrisonburg Police Department in their initial response to incidents involving explosives or explosive devices, explosion/bombing incidents or threats of such incidents. It is the policy of the Harrisonburg Police Department to place a higher priority on the safety of persons and the public over damage or destruction to public or private property. All possible efforts shall be made to prevent the detonation of explosive devices. However, the safety of citizens and police officers, and the limited availability of equipment to disarm or safely dispose of such devices, requires that devices be permitted to explode if, in the opinion of a bomb technician, the time to expected detonation is insufficient to disarm or otherwise safely dispose of such devices. A bomb technician, from the closest available law enforcement or military group shall be called to the scene as soon as practicable after a device has been found.

B. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

C. THREATS AGAINST GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

a. HARRISONBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT FACILITY

If the bomb threat is against Harrisonburg Police Department, the Patrol Commander or designee will direct and assign officers as required for coordinating a general building search or evacuation of the police department, as he/she deems appropriate.

b. OTHER COUNTY OR MUNICIPAL FACILITY OR PROPERTY

If the bomb threat is against a government facility within the jurisdiction of the Harrisonburg Police Department that is not the property of the City, the appropriate agency will be promptly informed of the threat. Assistance to the other entity may be provided as the Patrol Commander/supervisor deems appropriate.

c. FEDERAL BUILDING OR PROPERTY

If the bomb threat is against a federal building or property, the Federal Protective Service should be immediately notified. The Federal Protective Service provides a uniformed law enforcement response for most facilities, which may include use of its Explosive Detector Dog teams.

If the bomb threat is against a federal government property where the Federal Protective Service is unable to provide a timely response, the appropriate facility's security or command staff should be notified.

Bomb threats against a military installation should be reported to the military police or other military security responsible for the installation.

D. ASSISTANCE

The Patrol Commander or his/her designee should be notified when police assistance is requested. The Patrol Commander will make the decision whether the Department will render assistance and at what level. Information and circumstances that indicate a reasonably apparent, imminent threat to the safety of either the facility or the public may require a more active approach, including police control over the facility.

Should the Patrol Commander determine that the Department will assist or control such an incident, he/she will determine:

- a. The appropriate level of assistance.
- b. The plan for assistance.
- c. Whether to evacuate and/or search the facility.
- d. Whether to involve facility staff in the search or evacuation of the building.
 - 1. The person in charge of the facility should be made aware of the possibility of damage to the facility as a result of a search.
 - 2. The safety of all participants is the paramount concern.
- e. The need for additional resources, including:
 - 1. Notification and response, or standby notice, for fire and emergency medical services.

Even though a facility does not request police assistance to clear the interior of a building, based upon the circumstances and known threat, officers may be sent to the scene to evacuate other areas that could be affected by the type of threat, or for traffic and pedestrian control.

E. RECEIPT OF BOMB THREAT

Department employees receiving a bomb threat should obtain as much information from the individual as reasonably possible, including the type, placement, and alleged detonation time of the device.

Bomb Threat Procedures and Checklist

If the bomb threat is received on a recorded line, reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that the recording is preserved in accordance with established department evidence procedures.

The employee receiving the notification should obtain as much information as reasonably possible from the notifying individual, including:

- a. The location of the facility.
- b. The nature of the threat.
- c. Whether the type and detonation time of the device is known.
- d. Whether the facility is occupied and, if so, the number of occupants currently on scene.
- e. Whether the individual is requesting police assistance at the facility.

Whether there are any internal facility procedures regarding bomb threats in place, such as:

- a. No evacuation of personnel and no search for a device.
- b. Search for a device without evacuation of personnel.
- c. Evacuation of personnel without a search for a device.
- d. Evacuation of personnel and a search for a device.

The employee receiving the bomb threat should ensure that the Patrol Commander is immediately advised and informed of the details. This will enable the Patrol Commander to ensure that the appropriate personnel are dispatched, and, as appropriate, the threatened location is given an advance warning.

a. INVESTIGATING OFFICER PROCEDURE

- a. Upon receiving an assignment in reference to a bomb threat, the assigned unit(s) will proceed directly to the scene.
- b. Upon arrival at the scene, the first unit will take charge of the assignment and become the scene commander until relieved by a supervisor or a bomb technician.
- c. The investigating officer should call communications by phone in order to ascertain any information, which might be beneficial in locating the device or in determining a time element, which might be a consideration.
- d. It will be the responsibility of the unit(s) on the scene to work with the facility management in determining the possible need for evacuation. Decision making authority must weigh loss

- of productivity against risk of injury or death to personnel. Most decision makers will choose to evacuate for the protection of life. Whether or not to evacuate is a management decision of the facility and should be based on all available information. Evacuation will be mandatory if a device or suspected device is found.
- e. If the facility is to be evacuated, and if time permits, all evacuation routes should be searched prior to evacuation. The shift supervisor or designee shall contact the Bomb Detection Canine Handler and request a response to the incident prior to conducting a search of the area.
 - f. The Canine Handler will determine if the incident meets the criteria to conduct a canine search of the area. If the situation meets the criteria, the canine will conduct a search of the exterior and readily accessible areas and the interior of the facility. If the canine is not utilized, it will be the responsibility of the investigating officer to conduct an exterior search of those areas which are readily accessible. A search of the exterior areas of the threatened facility shall be conducted unless prohibited by management. If approved, the investigating officer should solicit the help of management to select their own personnel, or others to assist in conducting the search. These personnel generally are more familiar with the contents of the facility or what is suspicious in nature.
 - g. Responsibility for an interior search of a threatened facility will rest with the management of that facility. However, if management requests police assistance for an interior search, we will provide this assistance.
 - h. It shall be the responsibility of the Major Crimes Unit, after a bomb threat has been verified or a device has been found, to notify the appropriate Federal agencies within our jurisdiction.

b. SEARCH PERSONNEL PROCEDURE

- a. All search personnel should be cautioned to look for anything that is unfamiliar or out of place in a given area, and not to touch or disturb any suspicious or unfamiliar packages or containers.
- b. Searches should occur in pairs. When this is done, searches are more likely to be thorough.
- c. Begin the search on an outside perimeter and work toward the inside.
- d. Once inside, begin at the lowest floor level and work up to the top floor. This procedure reduces the risk of injury to both searchers and any occupants. Utility and service areas may be prime targets for those who want to shut down a business.
- e. Elevators should be run through at least one cycle. This may prevent injury if an explosive device is set to be activated by the action of an elevator.
- f. When conducting a room search, carry it out with the best method which will ensure thoroughness yet minimize confusion and delay.
- g. When conducting vehicle searches, remember that bombs planted in vehicles are usually directed at an individual rather than property.
- h. If time is an element of the reported threat, all search procedures should be discontinued 30 minutes prior to the reported time of threatened detonation and are not resumed until 30 minutes thereafter.
- i. If the building or area searched fails to disclose any suspected items, the responsibility for returning persons to the area shall also be the decision of the facility management.

No officer shall make any statement that no explosive device exists.

F. FOUND DEVICE

The investigating officer, and any support units, will be responsible for evacuating the immediate area in which the suspected device is located. A distance of 300 feet should be considered as a minimum. The scene should be completely secured. Officers should be posted at cordon/perimeter locations to keep all unauthorized persons out of the area.

Search personnel will relay available information immediately when a device is found:

- a. The time of discovery
- b. The exact location of the device
- c. A full description of the device (e.g., size, shape, markings, construction)
- d. The anticipated danger zone and perimeter
- e. The areas to be evacuated or cleared

When handling an incident involving a suspected explosive device, the following guidelines, while not all inclusive, should be followed:

- a. No known or suspected explosive item should be considered safe regardless of its size or apparent packaging
- b. The device should not be touched or moved except by the bomb squad or military explosive ordnance disposal team
- c. Personnel should not transmit on any equipment that is capable of generating radio frequency energy within the designated area around the suspected device. This includes:
 1. Two-way radios
 2. Cell phones
 3. Other personal communication devices
- d. A safe access route should be provided for support personnel and equipment
- e. Teams should continue to search the area for secondary devices as safety dictates and if manpower allows
- f. Consider evacuation of buildings and personnel near the device and identifying the safest exit route if evacuation becomes necessary.

a. COMMAND POST

A Command Post should be set up once a suspected device is located. It should initially be manned by the shift supervisor. The person with knowledge of the threatened facility may be admitted to the Command Post at the discretion of the Command Post supervisor. The Fire Department Officer in Charge shall be at the Command Post and briefed with all information.

- a. The Command Post should be located at least 300 feet from the suspected target area.
- b. The Command Post should have the capability of communicating with all involved personnel by the safest means possible.
- c. The investigating officer should report to the Command Post with information concerning the suspected device and the need for any support personnel, which will

include, but not be limited to, a bomb technician. This information should be relayed to communications.

G. EXPLOSION/BOMBING INCIDENTS

When an explosion has occurred, there are multitudes of considerations that may confront the responding officers. As in other catastrophic events, a rapid response may help to minimize injury to victims, contamination of the scene by gathering crowds, or any additional damage from fires or unstable structures.

Responsibilities:

- a. The Police Department shall have command responsibility and undertake all required activities in all cases involving a bomb threat and in all cases of bomb incidents; except that command responsibility shall shift to the Fire Department after any device in a bomb incident explodes.
- b. The Police Department, through personnel of the Major Crimes Unit, shall have investigative responsibilities in all bomb threat and bomb incident cases.
- c. Assessment of the nature of any device found in the course of a bomb threat or bomb incident shall be the responsibility of the bomb technicians, provided, however, they may call upon such other agencies as may be available to aid in the assessment of a device.
- d. The disarming and disposal of explosive materials or devices shall be the responsibility of the bomb technician, or such other agency or agencies as may be available.

a. CONSIDERATIONS

Officers responding to explosions, whether accidental or a criminal act, should consider the following actions:

- a. Assess the scope of the incident, including the number of victims and extent of injuries.
- b. Request additional personnel and resources, as appropriate.
- c. Assist with first aid.
- d. Identify and take appropriate precautions to mitigate scene hazards, such as collapsed structures, bloodborne pathogens and hazardous materials.
- e. Assist with the safe evacuation of victims, if possible.
- f. Establish an inner perimeter to include entry points and evacuation routes. Search for additional or secondary devices.
- g. Preserve evidence.
- h. Establish an outer perimeter and evacuate if necessary.
- i. Identify witnesses.

b. NOTIFICATIONS

When an explosion has occurred, the following people should be notified as appropriate:

- Fire department
- Bomb squad
- Additional department personnel, such as investigators and forensic services
- Field supervisor
- Patrol Commander
- Other law enforcement agencies, including local, state or federal agencies, such as the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)
- Other government agencies, as appropriate