
Response to Bomb Calls

416.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines to assist officers in their initial response to incidents involving suspicious packages and explosives.

416.2 POLICY

Officers shall follow these guidelines in their initial response to incidents involving suspicious packages, suspicious items, explosives, explosive devices, or explosion/bombing incidents.

Under no circumstances should these guidelines be interpreted as compromising the safety of first responders or the public. When confronted with an incident involving explosives, safety shall always be the primary consideration.

416.3 FOUND SUSPICIOUS ITEMS OR PACKAGES

When an officer responds to a call of a suspicious item or package, efforts should be taken to determine whether or not it is dangerous or may contain an explosive device. Some factors to consider when assessing the item or package include:

1. Is the item in close proximity to a high-value target (i.e., government building, area where large numbers of people gather, school)?
2. Has a threat been received in association with the discovery of the item?
3. Have there been recent related events involving the same type of suspicious item?
4. Does the reporting party believe that the item may be dangerous or an explosive device?
5. Are there odd odors or sounds coming from the item?
6. Is the exterior of the item discolored or have oily stains?
7. Are there wires, batteries, or other electronics components visible in the item or package?

Safety shall always be the primary consideration when assessing suspicious items or packages. If an officer believes that an item may be dangerous or contain an explosive device, it should be treated as a suspect device.

416.4 FOUND EXPLOSIVES/SUSPECT DEVICES

When an officer responds to a call of a suspected explosive device, the following guidelines shall be followed:

1. **Do not touch or move any known or suspected explosive item.**
2. No known or suspected explosive item should be considered safe regardless of its size or apparent packaging.

Response to Bomb Calls

3. If a known or suspected explosive item is found, notify the Portland Police Metro Explosive Disposal Unit (EDU) as soon as possible.
4. Secure the perimeter around the suspected device for a minimum of three hundred feet allowing for an entrance for support personnel.
5. Relay as much initial information as possible to the Shift Sergeant without touching the device, including:
 - (a) Any stated threats.
 - (b) How the bomb was made.
 - (c) The exact location of the item, including the specific address and/or building location or name, floor, room number and location in the room where the device has been placed.
 - (d) The type of bomb, its physical description (e.g., size, shape, markings) and/or container.
 - (e) The time the device will detonate.
 - (f) The reason the device was placed (motivation).
 - (g) The individual or group claiming responsibility.
6. Do not transmit on any equipment that produces radio frequency energy within 100 feet (e.g., hand held radio, car radio, cell phone, etc). Hand held radios generate less radio energy, and should be used for all on-scene communications outside of the 100 foot radius.
7. Consideration should be given to the possibility for evacuation if a device is located within a building or close to an area where civilians are present.
8. Once an area is clear of civilians, officers should retreat to an area of substantial cover.
9. Consider the need for support personnel such as paramedics and Fire Department personnel.
10. Explosive Disposal Unit (EDU) personnel will assume command of the scene upon their arrival and until the area is declared safe to enter.

416.5 EXPLOSION/BOMBING INCIDENTS

When an explosion has occurred, there are multitudes of considerations which may confront the patrol officer. As in other catastrophic incidents, a rapid response will help to minimize such things as further injury to victims, contamination of the scene by gathering crowds, further damage by resulting fires or unstable structures.

Whether the explosion was the result of an accident or a criminal act, the following concerns will need to be addressed:

1. Injury to victims.
2. First aid (primarily Fire Department responsibility).

Response to Bomb Calls

3. Evacuation of victims (primarily Fire Department responsibility).

416.5.1 NOTIFICATIONS

When an explosion has occurred, the following people shall be notified as soon as practical if their assistance is needed:

1. Vancouver Fire Department
2. Portland Police Metro Explosive Disposal Unit (EDU)
3. Additional field officers
4. Chain of Command
5. Arson Investigations Unit
6. Detectives

416.5.2 CROWD CONTROL

No one should be allowed free access to the scene unless they have a legitimate and authorized reason for being there.

416.5.3 SCENE OF INCIDENT

As in any other crime scene, steps should immediately be taken to preserve the scene. The scene could be extended for several hundred feet, at least one and one-half times the distance of the farthest piece of evidence from the area of the explosion. Evidence may be imbedded in nearby structures or hanging in trees and bushes, etc.

A search of the area should be conducted for other objects foreign to the area such as a secondary device. If an item is found, it should not be touched. The item should be secured and personnel should wait for the arrival of the Explosive Disposal Unit.

416.6 BOMB THREATS

When an officer responds to a call involving a bomb threat, the following procedures apply.

416.6.1 ASK QUESTIONS

The officer should ask specific questions regarding the bomb threat:

1. The following questions should be asked in the event of a bomb threat:
 - (a) The exact location of the item, including the specific address and/or building location or name, floor, room number and location in the room where the device has been placed.
 - (b) Any stated threats.
 - (c) How the bomb was made.
 - (d) The time the device will detonate.
 - (e) The type of bomb, its physical description and/or container.
 - (f) The reason the device was placed (motivation).

Response to Bomb Calls

- (g) The individual or group claiming responsibility.
- 2. If the bomb threat is taken by phone, attempt to keep the caller on the line as long as possible and document the answers to these five basic questions.
 - (a) Time of the call.
 - (b) Exact words of the person as accurately as possible.
 - (c) Age and sex of the caller.
 - (d) Speech patterns and/or accents.
 - (e) Background noises.

If the incoming call is received on a recorded line, steps shall be taken to ensure that the recording is retrieved as evidence.

416.6.2 PROCEDURES

The officer should follow specific procedures regarding the bomb threat:

1. As soon as a bomb threat has been received, the Shift Sergeant will be advised and fully informed of the details.
2. Police officers must not participate in the search of buildings without the expressed approval of the field supervisor. In the case of an approval for participation in a search, it is the duty of the Officer on the scene to advise the owner, manager, or responsible person that if Police have not found a bomb, or suspicious device, there is no guarantee that none exists.
3. In the event that search is conducted and a suspect device is found, the ranking officer on scene will secure the area and start an evacuation of the immediate and adjacent area.
4. When a threat is received by any facility, building, and/or premise, public or private, the decision to evacuate is the responsibility of the person in charge of the facility, building or premises. A police officer will not make the decision to evacuate an occupied building unless a suspicious object is found or factual information is received that a bomb has been placed in the building.

416.7 ACTIVATION OF THE EXPLOSIVE DISPOSAL UNIT (EDU)

EDU can be activated by a request through dispatch. Officers should be prepared to give dispatch a brief description of the suspected device, a location of a safe staging area for EDU, and if feasible, a callback phone number for EDU. EDU will be activated in the following circumstances:

1. When a suspicious object is discovered and the officer believes that there is a possibility that it is an explosive or incendiary device.
2. When any explosive, explosive chemical, or ordnance is discovered abandoned, illegally possessed, or voluntarily surrendered (including ammunition .50 caliber or larger).
3. When large quantities of illegal fireworks are discovered or seized.

Vancouver Police Department

Vancouver PD Policy Manual

Response to Bomb Calls

4. When an explosive or incendiary device has detonated.
5. If an officer intends to charge or arrest an individual with possession or manufacture of an explosive device under RCW 70.74.