

Bag Search Procedure

Overview

An Emergency Shelter must be committed to maintaining a safe environment for all staff, guests, volunteers and community partners. Bag searches, self-searches and locker searches are important tools used to exercise a measure of control and containment of potential hazards entering the shelter building. Accordingly, all people accessing the emergency shelter may be subject to search of their personal belongings (as always Emergency Shelters should create their own policies and procedures surrounding searches).

Emergency shelters are a service hub for many vulnerable persons. Respect for an individual's dignity and autonomy should remain the center of focus. All searches should be conducted with compassion and trauma-informed care. Whenever possible, have the guest conduct as self-search. This is the safest and least intrusive practice.

Search Kit

Search kits should be used for all searches. Having a kit of appropriate tools used for each search enhances safety and saves time by having all required materials available and together. Each kit should contain the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and tools required to complete the search. Kits should be available in appropriate areas where searches may be conducted. Inventory should be monitored and damaged or missing items replaced immediately. Staff should be made aware of the location of search kits and also on the procedure for re-stocking them.

Suggested Search Kit Inventory

- Puncture proof gloves
- Flashlight
- Tongs
- Small Bio Bin
- Stick or instrument that can be used to move items in a bag without having to use hands

- Clear disposable trash bags

Bag Searches

Guests may be asked for a search anywhere in the building. Search upon entry is the most effective way to foster safety and consistency within the building. The consent of an individual must always be obtained and respected. Proper communication and explanation should be used by staff at all times. The following is a suggested search procedure:

1. Ensure you explain the procedure, options and reason for the search before proceeding. Ensure you have clear verbal consent from the guest before proceeding.
2. Provide the option for the guest to conduct self-search, where they go through and show the the contents of their belongings themselves.
3. Ensure you receive clear verbal consent when a secondary search is required on personal items such as a purse or wallet.

4. Complete the search in an area that provides as much privacy as possible. If you are performing a search in a common area ensure it is as private as possible. Use of a private space or behind a divider or some type of partition is recommended.

Search Refusal

- Guests have the right to refuse a search of their personal belongings.
- Offer another staff member or supervisor to conduct the search.
- Explain the amnesty tote program and provide the guest with the option to store their unsearched belongings, until the following morning.
- If a guest refuses a search and does not want to use the amnesty tote program the emergency shelter retains the right to refuse service. Ensure the guest is made aware that they will be welcomed back when they are ready to comply with the search or make use of the amnesty tote program.

Bag Search Procedure

- Always use a search kit, PPE and additional safety equipment such as eye protection.
- Ask the guest if there are any contraband or dangerous items present prior to beginning the search.
- When possible, it is best practice to have male staff search male individuals and female staff search female individuals. For gender-diverse, transgender, and non-binary

individuals, staff should ask individuals for their gender preference regarding who conducts the search, and make every effort to accommodate the request.

- Staff should never put their hands anywhere that is not clearly visible. This will help to prevent needle pokes or cuts.
- Move items within a bag using a "search stick" and a flashlight, do not use hands.
- If any used items that can be used for the consumption of substances are discovered, end the search and ask the guest if there is the possibility of any additional dangerous items.
 - Have the guest conduct the rest of the search themselves.
 - Offer the guest new harm reduction products and a safe Bio Bin to dispose of used items.
- Ask the guest to remove excess clothing and empty their pockets. Never place your hands on a guest. Instruct them to take off their jackets or empty their pockets on their own. Ask the guest to turn their pockets inside out in order to ensure no small items are being hidden. Pant legs can be pulled up and socks turned down. No pat downs or frisks should be conducted by staff.

Metal Detector and Search Wand

Each emergency shelter should have its own policies and procedures regarding search wands and/or metal detectors. The following are some suggested guidelines.

- Ask the guest if they would prefer a male or female to conduct the scan.
- Explain to the guest that we will be using a metal detecting wand and get clear consent from the guest to use it.
- Wands should be set to vibrate upon detection. A buzzer should not be used.
- Ask the guest to put their arms out, then them you are going to scan the top of their arms and ask for consent, if consent is given, scan over both arms.
- Ask the guest for consent to scan their torso and the sides of their torso. If consent is given scan these areas.
- Ask the guest for consent to scan the inside and front of their legs. If consent is given scan these areas.
- Ask the guest to turn around. Ask the guest for consent to scan the back of their torso and the back of their legs. If consent is given scan these areas.

Prohibited Items

Emergency shelters should have security procedures in place for the safe disposal of prohibited items.

- Weapons (real or replica)
- Ammunition
- Bear or pepper spray
- Alcohol
- Alcohol-based products (i.e. hairspray, mouth wash, hand sanitizer, rubbing alcohol etc.)
- Cannabis
- Controlled substances (drugs) where there is no clearly marked prescription.

- Harm reduction supplies used for the consumption of controlled substances (i.e. pipes, cookers, needles).
- Empty cans or bottles.

Please note that guests should be allowed to keep medication that is labeled with a prescription and is untampered with.

Locker Searches

Locker searches are preformed by two (2) staff members as a team. Locker searches are conducted only at the direction of management.

- Staff should always use a search kit, including puncture proof gloves, and appropriate PPE when conducting a locker search.
- Use a table and move items from the locker onto the table. This allows for easier visualization of the contents of the locker.
- Carefully remove items from the locker and onto the table. Handle items with respect and care.
- Never place your hands where you cannot clearly see. This will help to prevent needle sticks and/or cuts.
- Always use a flashlight.
- Conduct bag searches using the procedures outlined on page 2.
- If prohibited items are found follow the procedure of the emergency shelter for disposal.
- Ensure that items are returned to the locker in an orderly and respectful manner. Try to return the locker to a similar state that it was found in. Try to place items back in the place that they were found.