


NORTHAMPTON POLICE DEPARTMENT		
Administration & Operations Manual		
Policy: Use of Knox Boxes		AOM: O-604
Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards Referenced:		Issuing Authority <hr/> Jody Kasper Chief of Police
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I. Introductory Discussion

- A. On occasion it is necessary for police officers to enter residences to check on the welfare of occupants or to render medical or other emergency assistance. It may also be necessary for police officers to gain emergency access to school or community buildings either when a school is in use or after hours when the building is closed. In order to eliminate the need to make forced entries for such purposes and to expedite entry of emergency personnel without the need to await the arrival of Housing Authority personnel, or school officials, the Northampton Housing Authority, the State Housing Authority and Northampton School Department makes available master keys to the Police Department for entry into residences or school buildings under their respective control.

- B. The master keys for Housing Authority residences and schools are kept locked in secure containers, called Knox Boxes. A Knox Box with master keys has been installed on the exterior of each of the Housing Authority's residential complexes and at the main entrances of the public school buildings. Access to these boxes is by a special key. This key opens all the Knox Boxes designated for use by the police. This special key is registered to and under the auspices of the Northampton Housing Authority. It is the housing authority that provides copies of this key to the Police Department.

II. Policy

- A. Use of the master keys in a Knox Box is restricted to those situations where emergency entrance into a residence or a school is necessary and where a forcible entry would otherwise be justified. Those circumstances where such use would be allowed are:
1. To check on the well being of an occupant, when there is reason to believe that the occupant may be in distress or danger or who has threatened self-harm.
 2. To effect the rescue or evacuation of an occupant in the event of fire or other life threatening emergency.
 3. To verify the safety of an occupant, who calls 9-1-1 and hangs up and who does not respond to an officer at the door
 4. To provide medical or other emergency assistance when an occupant is unable to unlock the door of a residence.
 5. In the case school buildings, to provide medical or emergency assistance or to intervene or affect a rescue in a fire, active shooter or other situation where there is an eminent threat or danger to the occupants within. Also, to access a building after hours when there is reason to suspect that an intruder is inside or to prevent damage or alleviate the potential for damage to the building in event of a fire or a physical plant emergency, requiring immediate entry and intervention.
- B. The use of the master keys is not to be utilized for criminal investigative purposes. The master keys are not to be used to enter a residence in the execution of a search warrant without the expressed authorization of the Housing Authority's Executive Director, Administrator, or designee.
- C. Master keys are not to be used for the purpose of admitting residents who are locked out of their residences.
- D. Due to the grave security concerns presented by the accessibility of these master keys, the Police Department will take appropriate measures to insure that the Knox Box access keys are properly safeguarded.

III. Procedures

- A. The Housing Authority shall number all Knox Box keys, provided to the Police Department. These keys shall be under the general control of the Police Department's Supply Supervisor. The Supply Supervisor will be the Police Department's liaison with the Housing Authority for Knox Box keys and shall oversee key distribution, and maintain a record of such distribution.
- B. Both cruiser and bicycle patrol officers may be assigned Knox Box keys by the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) for use during the course of their shift assignment. Under no circumstance is the Knox Box key to remain in the possession of an officer when off-duty. If an officer inadvertently takes a key off-duty, the key

- must be immediately returned. The OIC is responsible to insure the return of Knox Box keys.
- C. Before accessing master keys from a Knox Box, an officer must obtain authorization from the Officer-In-Charge (OIC) or patrol supervisor.
 - D. At the time master keys are removed from a Knox Box, the accessing officer shall notify the Dispatch Center.
 - E. Upon receiving this notification, the Dispatch Center shall make a note of the access time on the Daily Log.
 - F. As soon as possible after the termination of the call, the officer who removed the master keys shall return them to the Knox Box and secure it.
 - G. Immediately upon return of the master keys to the Knox Box, the officer shall notify the Dispatch Center of the return.
 - H. Upon being notified about the return of the master keys to the Knox Box, the Dispatch Center shall complete a *Knox Box Access Reporting Form* and fax it to the Housing Authority. This form shall include the following information:
 - 1. Date
 - 2. Record number
 - 3. Building location
 - 4. Number(s) of the apartment(s) or unit(s) entered
 - 5. Resident's / Occupant's name
 - 6. Officer accessing master keys
 - 7. Authorizing Supervisor
 - 8. Time master keys removed
 - 9. Time master keys returned

The original of the reporting form is to be forwarded through inter-city mail to the Police Department's Records Bureau for retention.

- I. If a Knox Box access key is lost or unaccounted for, or if master keys are discovered to be missing from a Knox Box at a housing authority property, the on duty OIC will immediately notify the Housing Authority's Executive Director, Administrator, or designee. If master keys are discovered to be missing from a Knox Box at a school, the on-duty OIC will immediately notify the School Department's Director of Maintenance, or designee. Also, the OIC will report any lost or missing Knox Box access key to the Supply Supervisor.