

**Branch County Courthouse**  
**WEAPONS SCREENING POLICY**  
*Amended, February 14, 2007*

**INTRODUCTION**

The provision of safety and security in court facilities is a critical aspect of an efficient and effective court operation. The limitation of weapons and other contraband from the confines of the court is a basic component of a practical and effective contraband reduction program.

**PURPOSE**

To establish a procedure for weapons screening of persons entering the Branch County Courthouse by court security personnel.

**SCOPE**

This policy applies to all members of the Branch County Courthouse security staff who are assigned to weapons screening duties.

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

**I. Officer Conduct**

- A. Court security personnel assigned to screen all individuals and parcels entering the Branch County Courthouse shall familiarize themselves with the proper operation of the screening device and shall be able to competently operate said equipment.
- B. All court security personnel shall receive and successfully complete training in the proper operation of said screening equipment.
- C. Court security personnel shall treat individuals subject to screening with dignity and courtesy.
- D. Court security officers assigned to screening shall maintain a professional demeanor and shall not allow themselves to be distracted from the screening procedure. Screeners shall be polite and courteous to all entering the building, but involvement in social interaction shall not interfere with the screening process.
- E. If an individual enters the screening area, private social interaction shall cease and attention shall be focused on the screening process.
- F. Court security officers shall not leave their assigned posts unless properly relieved.

**II. Screening Procedures**

- A. Screening device post
  - 1. By direction of the Branch County Board of Commissioners, all persons entering the East entrance of the Branch County Courthouse shall be screened. The only persons exempt from screening:
    - a. Courthouse employees and officials with County ID Cards.
    - b. Local attorneys with County ID Cards.

- c. Department Heads will have the authority to refuse unescorted Trustees into their offices.
2. On-duty law enforcement officers shall be allowed to retain their weapons while in the court facility unless the officer is a party to a personal case pending before the court. Upon presentation of proper credentials, on-duty officers shall be allowed to bypass the screening process as directed by the screener. Non-uniformed law enforcement officers shall be instructed to immediately identify themselves with the court officer in the courtroom in which they have business.  
Provisions should be made to accommodate undercover officers who are in the court facility. It is important that they not be publicly identified.
3. The court security officer assigned to the screening post shall conduct a test of the screening device each day prior to the opening of the Courthouse facility to ascertain that it is in proper working order.
4. Should the screening device not be in proper working order, the officer conducting the test shall notify the security support at once so that maintenance and repair may be performed in a timely manner. Screening shall be conducted by use of handheld screening devices until the screening device is again in working order.
5. Immediately upon entering the facility, individuals shall be greeted by the screening officer and instructed as follows:
  - a. If the person has any prohibited item in their possession (see page 3) they must return it to their vehicle before proceeding through the screening process. Officers shall require individuals to activate any permitted electronic devices, i.e. laptop computers, palm pilots, etc. to insure they are working prior to entering the facility. See attachment A for a sheet to be given to the general public if Security Personnel is questioned by the General Public.
  - b. All packages, parcels, purses, and briefcases shall be placed either on the screening table or on the x-ray conveyor without being opened. The screening officer may open and visibly inspect any item. If deemed necessary, it shall also be subject to screening by a hand-held screening device. Visual searches shall be as non-invasive as possible. Screening officers shall limit their search to finding prohibited items.
  - c. All metal objects (loose change, keys, watch, pen(s), belts, jewelry, etc.) shall be placed in the provided container to be retrieved after passing through the screening device.
  - d. Footwear may be removed prior to screening if it is determined to contain metal.
  - e. Persons wearing items or clothing with excessive metal (i.e. bib overalls, coveralls, non-removable belts) may be denied access to the Courthouse if the clothing activates the scanning device. The aforementioned items may be removed and placed through the x-ray scanning device.

6. Should an individual refuse to allow any package, parcel, purse, or briefcase to be examined or refuses to proceed through the screening device (except for medical reasons as outlined below), the individual may be allowed to terminate the screening process, collect his/her property and exit the facility.
7. If an individual passes through the screening device and activates the alarm, he/she shall be given the opportunity to ascertain whether any metal object may have been overlooked. However, should the individual decide to terminate the screening process, and collect his/her belongings, he/she shall be allowed to do so.
8. An individual who has activated the alarm and still desires entry to the facility shall be asked to re-examine their person for additional metal objects and deposit any found into the provided container. They shall then pass through the screening device again. Should the alarm be activated again, the individual shall be screened using a hand-held screening device.
9. Should contraband be discovered, the item(s) shall be confiscated and a person who has the power of arrest shall be contacted forthwith. Proper disposition shall then be made of the contraband as well as the individual transporting it. Should it become necessary, during such an incident, other persons desiring to enter the court facility may be instructed to wait outside and the entrance shall be secured by security personnel until such time as the situation has been resolved.  
Should the individual exit the facility prior to the arrival of appropriate law enforcement assistance, court security officers shall not pursue the individual but will notify local law enforcement. Should the individual not flee, a person with appropriate power of arrest may make a custodial arrest as permitted by law.
10. Should an individual indicate that passing through the screening device would create a potential health hazard (i.e. pace maker, or other valid medical condition); the screening officer shall require verification of said condition. The individual shall be allowed to bypass the screening device and may be subject to a pat-down search of their person.

### **III. Prohibited Items**

- A. The following is a list of prohibited items. Individuals found in possession of such items shall be required to return such items to his/her vehicle as a condition of entry:
  1. Legal firearms
  2. Legal knives or edged instruments
  3. Aerosol sprays
  4. Pepper spray
  5. Chemical mace
  6. Non-working electronic devices
  7. Razor blades
  8. Scissors

9. Utensils or tools of any kind
  10. Knitting needles or hat pins
  11. Heavy metal items such as locks, chains, handcuffs, large keys
  12. Any item which could be construed as a potential weapon by the screening officer
- B. The Branch County Courthouse shall not either store or voucher any items to be reclaimed later.

**IV. Public Notice**

It is recommended that courts compose and prominently post a notice that outlines the screening policy and procedure of the court.

**V. Violation**

Violation of this policy may result in arrest.

**ATTACHMENT A**

**The following items are prohibited from being brought into the Branch County Courthouse by the General Public.**

- 1) Any sharp objects including screwdrivers, pointed scissors, and needle point.**
- 2) Large Tools**
- 3) Handguns**
- 4) Rifles**
- 5) Shotguns**
- 6) Stun Guns**
- 7) Pepper Spray/Mace**
- 8) Any other item deemed to be a security risk at discretion of Courthouse Security Personnel**

**The Security Deputy at the desk will not hold any of the above items.**

**Per order of:**

**Branch County Sheriff  
County Commissioners  
County Administrator**