

Part 7 - Methods for searching places and vehicles

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Summary

Purpose

This chapter describes various methods that can be used for carrying out searches of:

- outdoor spaces, including open areas, roadsides, water
- the interior and exterior of premises
- vehicles and transport facilities.

It also outlines general procedures for planning searches (mainly outdoor searches) including:

- defining objectives
- making a reconnaissance and/ or appreciation
- briefing searchers.

See related information below for links to more specific procedures involving search powers and evidential searches.

Examples of when the search methods can be applied

The methods described can be used for any type of search and for any purpose, including searches:

- carried out by way of search warrant or warrantless search powers under the Search and Surveillance Act 2012
- of crime scenes and other evidential searches
- for missing persons, suspects etc.

Related information

Information in this chapter supports more specific information and procedures in these chapters:

- [Carrying out search powers with or without warrant](#) (includes information about risk assessment, entry procedures)
- [Crime scene examination](#) (covers such things as preserving evidence and evidence integrity and decontamination zones)
- [Searching people](#)
- [Improvised explosive devices and bomb threats](#).

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Planning and conducting a search

General search processes outlined

The process outlined in this table applies generally to all searches. However, some modifications may be required depending on the nature and purpose of the search, e.g. when search powers (with or without warrant) are being exercised, or the search is to locate evidential material at crime scenes or a missing person.

Step	Action
1	Define the objective when assigning the task.
2	Make a reconnaissance unless time is critical. If there is no time for a reconnaissance, obtain advice and guidance from a person familiar with the area.
3	Make an appreciation considering all known factors to decide on the best course of action.
4	Make a plan which must include an organisation chart. It must also specify the method of search. See Search methods (mainly outdoors) .
5	Ensure that you have sufficient tools and equipment.
6	Brief searchers and support staff. They must know the background to the search, what is happening, and what is required of them. Except during searches for dangerous escapees or offenders, formal Orders Groups are seldom held.
7	When the team leaders arrive at the search scene, brief them on the search area, topography and boundaries. Team leaders then assemble their sections, draw the necessary equipment and move to their search areas.
8	Depending on the method of search, the team may, on reaching its position, start searching, lay out boundary markers or await the search controller's instructions. As each team searches, the team leader must record the areas searched, and who has searched them.
9	If necessary, consider whether the services of the Specialist Search Group should be deployed.

Defining the objective

When assigning the task, tell the operation commander or O/C scene:

- the reason for the search
- exactly what things or people are sought
- the time-lapse, and any causes of delay
- the location, area and boundaries of the search
- limitations in human resources, time, security or logistics.

Making a reconnaissance

Unless time is critical, make a reconnaissance to establish:

- size of the area
- type of terrain
- obstacles or features requiring specialist personnel or equipment, such as cliffs, rivers, swamps or caves
- hazards requiring safety precautions
- possible sites for observation points, search headquarters and base
- access for transport
- any security problems.

Establishing a radio listening post will enable you to act quickly on information gained.

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The reconnaissance can be on foot, or in a vehicle or aircraft. [Helicopters](#) are especially useful because they can hover, carry out low-level reconnaissance and land almost anywhere. If you are working on foot, you can use dogs. They may rapidly find evidence that will remove the need for a full-scale search. Choose the method that best meets the needs of the operation and the availability of time.

Making an appreciation

Consider:

- the location
- the thing or person sought
- terrain and any hazards
- priorities
- time factors, such as:
 - if you are searching for a person, how long they have been in the open
 - daylight hours available
 - whether temporary lighting is possible
 - the time available for the search
 - travel time to the scene
 - the time required for briefings and [Orders Groups](#)
- climatic conditions and weather forecast
- human resources required, and their level of expertise
- water and toilet facilities
- safety and security
- morale
- administration and logistics, including:
 - communications
 - accommodation
 - catering
 - transport
 - maps
 - equipment
- any other operational requirements.

Briefing

The briefing provides an opportunity for the search controller to motivate the search teams and should include:

- reason for the search
- the item or person sought
- search method
- what to do on finding the item or person
- degree of confidentiality
- expected duration of the search
- composition of the search teams
- command structure
- hours of duty
- what to wear
- logistics, such as catering, accommodation and transport.

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Ensuring evidence is not overlooked

This table provides guiding principles for searches generally to ensure evidence is not overlooked.

Step	Action
1	Be careful, methodical and tidy, so that you do not overlook items or make mistakes in recording and labelling them. Have respect for the premises and property - remember that you are dealing with someone else's personal possessions.
2	For more effective control and results, use a minimum number of enforcement officers or assistants. This will minimise distractions and help to prevent evidence being overlooked.
3	Do not search at night. If this is unavoidable, make a further examination in daylight.
4	In appropriate situations, consider photographing the area before beginning the search. This is particularly important when the search may change or damage the appearance of the area. Ensure that everything is photographed, and consider using a video camera. When the search is complete, photograph the scene again.
5	Once the search is finished, consider repeating it, allocating different areas to different enforcement officers or assistants.
6	When supervisors are satisfied that an area has been properly searched, they should withdraw their team, mark the area with a sign or other mark such as emergency tape or chalk, and advise the assigned officer in charge of 'Search Control'.
7	When a thing is found and is to be seized, mark its position on a map (sketch plan) by recording its distance from a fixed point. The thing can then be accurately re-placed for any reconstruction. When it is moved or seized, it must be labelled with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• its description• where it was found• who found it• the date and time of discovery.

Specialist Search Group

Specialist Search Teams forming part of the Specialist Search Group (SSG) have been established in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to provide specialist support to general police.

The teams' primary role is to search for improvised explosive devices and other dangerous items or substances. However, their training and equipment enable them to be deployed in other contexts, such as crime scene examinations, exhibit recovery and 'booby-trapped' cannabis plantations. They are experienced in searching vehicles, aircraft and vessels.

To achieve maximum efficiency, ordinary Police employees must first, where practical, follow the procedures in this chapter. For detailed information about when specialist search teams may be deployed and the services they can provide, refer to the [Specialist Search Group](#) chapter in the Police Manual.

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Search methods (mainly outdoors)

Introduction

The information in this topic focuses mainly on outdoor searches. See also the [Crime scene examination](#) chapter, particularly for indoor searches.

Sweep

The sweep method is best suited to searches in open areas for people or large items.

A line of searchers systematically examine a section of ground. The upper boundary of the ground to be searched is marked out along a pre-determined line and the search team lined up at 90 degrees to the beginning of this line, with one member on the boundary. Searchers may be two yards apart in thick ground cover, or up to 30m in open country, but must remain in sight of each other. The distance apart also depends on the nature and size of the item(s) for which you are searching. Every piece of ground must be searched.

As the team progresses, the lower boundary of the sweep is marked by the person at the other end of the line of searchers. When the sweep is complete, the team pivots around this person and returns in the other direction. The person who was lowest, uses the marks they made on the first sweep to establish the upper boundary of the second. The member at the bottom of the second sweep marks the upper boundary of the third, and so on. See the diagram below.

In areas intersected with ridges, the team should line up along one ridge and cross the valley to the next, then re-form to left or right and return.

Team leader's role

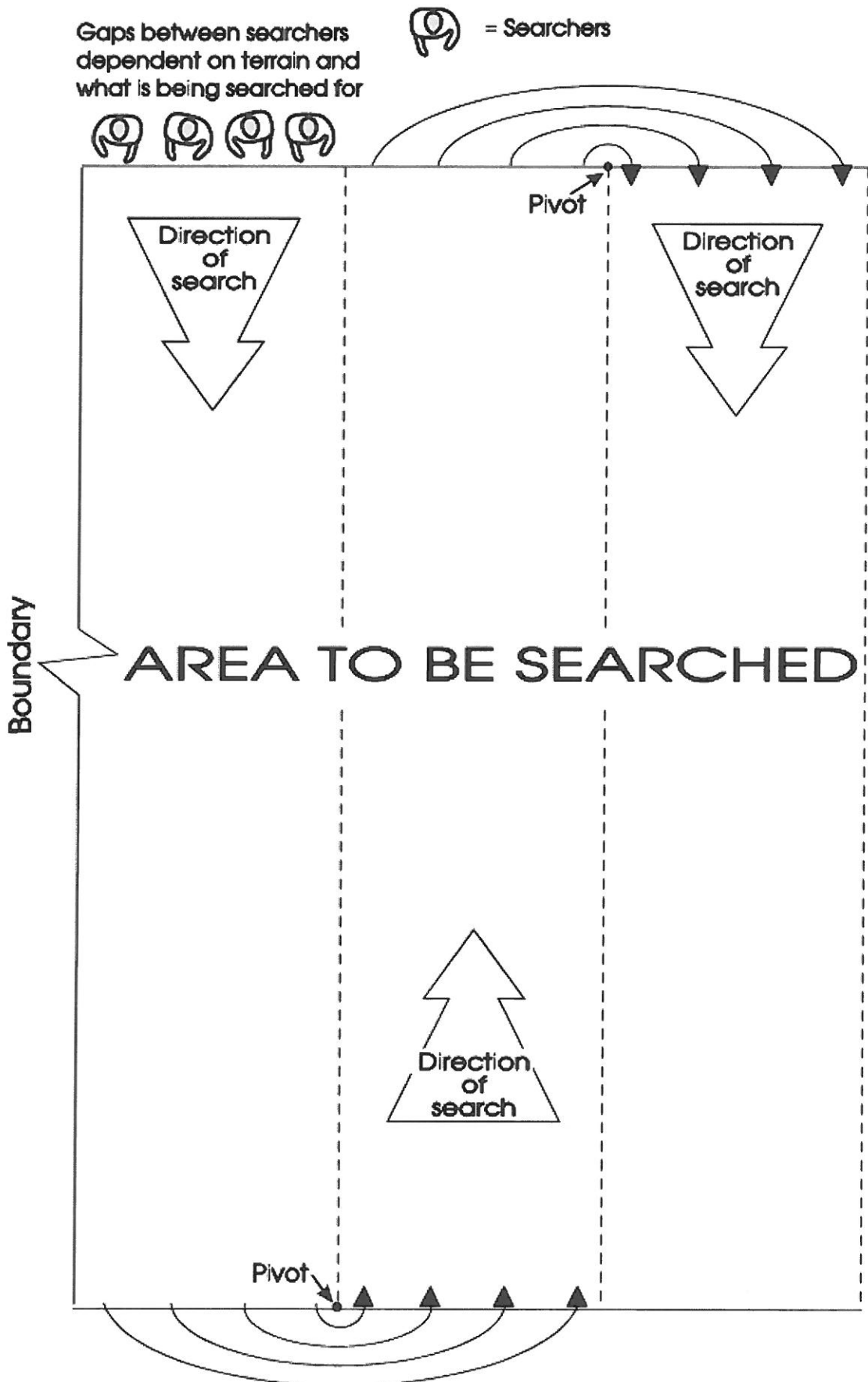
The team leader should control the team from the centre of the line. They may form part of the search line if the personnel are experienced, or walk behind and direct them, if they are not.

The team leader must:

- control the speed of the forward movement
- keep the team in a straight line.

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Contact searches

Contact searches are a type of sweep search in which each member is within touching distance of the next person in the line.

This method is labour intensive and slow, but results in a more thorough search. It is particularly useful in searching large areas of dense bush or searching for very small items. Team leaders must ensure that the team keeps in line and moves at a speed that is manageable for all members.

Parallel lane

This method is used when searching for evidence.

The area is divided with twine into parallel lanes not more than two metres wide. The actual width is determined by the size and type of area being searched, the activity that took place there and the kind of evidence sought.

Each searcher is assigned two neighbouring lanes, e.g. searcher A will search lane A1, and then return in lane A2. Searcher B will search lane B1 and return in lane B2.

Where a meticulous search is required, the area within each lane may be divided into a grid.

Grid

Where a meticulous search of an area is required, a grid search is used.

Divide the area into numbered squares that are one metre square, using tape or twine. These squares are further divided if necessary. One searcher is assigned to each unit, and their name and area of responsibility recorded.

For a diagram of a grid search, see the [Disaster victim identification](#) chapter in the Police Manual.

Double strip

This method uses the sweep search technique to cover the same piece of ground from two different angles. The area is marked into a grid, with the searchers covering the ground as illustrated above.

The method can be used by individuals or groups, and enables efficient searching using minimal resources.

If the search area is small and has little undergrowth, it can be marked out and grid searched.

Roadside searches

Teams should not be asked to walk along a road with no predetermined finishing point. If they do this, they will rapidly become bored and inattentive. Instead, one of these methods should be used.

Method 1	Method 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Divide the road into sections of about 4 kilometres.• Place one team on the start line and a second at the 8 kilometre mark.• The two teams work toward each other for each 8 kilometre stretch.	<p>Use two teams and a vehicle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One team commences the search while the other drives a predetermined distance, leaves the vehicle, and begins searching away from the first.• When the first team reaches the

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<p>If there are sufficient personnel, multiple stretches, and both sides of the road, can be searched simultaneously.</p>	<p>vehicle, they take it and leap frog ahead to a new starting point.</p> <p>This method has the advantage of providing communications, independent transport and, if necessary, shelter.</p>
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Marking boundaries

Wherever possible, boundary markers must be used to define the area that has been, or is to be, searched. Tanalised binder twine is the most suitable material because once laid, it will remain in position and last many months. Another effective boundary marker is spray paint on trees. In large search areas, landmarks such as rivers and fences may be used.

In small search areas, it is often easier to mark out all the boundaries and assign a team to each area before starting the search.

Note: When conducting a parallel lane or grid search, take care to avoid or minimise the contamination of evidence when marking out lanes.

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Searching premises

Preparing to search

Obtain information about the layout of the premises. If you are searching a large building, ask maintenance personnel, janitors and supervisors. Also obtain building and utilities plans, and keys to locked areas, rooms and facilities.

For crime scene searches:

- When a detailed search of a total area is not required, consider starting the search from the outside boundary of the property, and following the offender's route, working systematically and methodically towards the point of entry.
- Remember that searching for evidence can destroy other evidence. Set priorities and determine the sequence that the search will take.

Searching for items

The interior

A team of two constables is usually ideal for a confined interior search.

Follow these steps when searching the interior of premises.

Step	Action
1	Photograph and fingerprint the scene before searching.
2	Use rooms to define the search areas. Allocate areas of responsibility by assigning one searcher to each room. Note each searcher's area of responsibility on a sketch plan. Record their details.
3	Begin the search by having one searcher search the access route into the room of the seat of activity. Systematically search the hall and then all of the rooms.
4	Assign one searcher to search one room. This will minimise distractions and help to prevent evidence being overlooked. If the room is very large or if a very thorough search is required, two searchers may be used.
5	Search each room. Start at the door and work around the room in a circle. If two searchers are used, each circles the room in opposite directions.
6	Information withheld
7	Information withheld
8	Information withheld
9	Information withheld
10	Consider having the area re-searched by allocating different areas to different people. Remember that a room has already been searched twice if two searchers were used.

The exterior

Follow these steps when searching the exterior.

Step	Action
1	Protect the scene from adverse weather.
2	Begin the exterior search at ground level, and include the area around the building. When searching a crime scene, begin with the access route, working inwards from the boundary and covering about half a metre each side of the route. The search then continues in defined areas of responsibility, again working inwards from the boundary.
3	Information withheld
4	Information withheld
5	Information withheld

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For more information specific to searching for evidence, see the [Crime scene examination](#) Police Manual chapter.

Searching for suspects

If you have reason to believe the suspect is dangerous, consider calling out the AOS. Refer to [Deploying the AOS](#) in the 'Armed Offender Squad' Police Manual chapter for further information about when the AOS should be deployed.

Where force may be used or has been threatened, the operation is considered a critical incident and you must conduct a risk assessment and consider the tactical options.

Entering and searching buildings

Building entry and search operations are inherently dangerous and should be avoided if possible. First try verbal appeal, telephone negotiation and waiting.

It may be necessary to enter a building if:

- the suspect is believed to be incapacitated or dead
- you have to:
 - eliminate the building in an area search for a moving suspect
 - search the building for evidence or other occupants after the suspect has left
 - recover a wounded person
 - use the element of surprise to apprehend the suspect, if appropriate.

Searchers should have:

- a full description of the suspect and other people in the building
- information on any weapons the suspect has, and their ability to use them
- an interior plan of the building, including the location of the telephone and electrical switchboard
- an exterior plan, including doors, windows, areas of cover, and observation points available to the suspect
- information on the location of people in the building.

When entering and searching:

- approach and enter quietly
- clear outbuildings first
- guard manholes and locked doors until the open areas have been searched
- make plans with an emphasis on safety.

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Searching open areas

Searching for items

The operation commander must mark permanent key points on the map from which search boundaries could be accurately re-constructed.

Aircraft are ideal for searching over open country and water, but have limited value over bush. Their usefulness is also limited by the type of item sought and their high cost.

Information withheld

Searching water

Water searches pose special problems, because conditions vary continuously and there are many hidden dangers. Whenever you can, obtain assistance from people with local knowledge. Consider using divers. Difficult or lengthy diving tasks should be undertaken by the [Police National Dive Squad](#) or the Royal New Zealand Navy Diving Squad.

Before searching large expanses of water, plan the operation carefully to ensure that the whole area is covered. Consider using helicopters as well as boats.

Searching rivers and streams on foot requires a high degree of safety awareness. Personnel should be supervised by an experienced search and rescue member.

When searching deep rivers, divide the search team into three, assigning a boat and area of responsibility to each. Proceed upstream, moving slowly to minimise the boat's wash, as this could jostle and even sink debris lying in still water.

Searching for suspects

Searching is fraught with danger, especially when it is dark. Do not try it if safer methods are available. Instead:

- cordon and contain the area as thoroughly as possible, covering possible exit routes
- put observers on high ground to conduct a visual search for the suspect
- use a helicopter, or verbal appeal
- wait for the suspect to appear.

If safer methods are not possible and a search is necessary, first conduct a risk assessment to control the risks. Then try either:

Extended line search	Arrowhead formation	Spearhead formation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• form an extended line, in line of sight, with the team leader and dog handler positioned near the centre• use the dog to free search ahead of the line• keep the line as straight as possible so that no member becomes isolated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• form an arrowhead formation of 60 to 90 degrees• follow the procedures for extended line search, modified as necessary. <p>This method is more suitable for open country than for bush.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• make an arrowhead formation, but with the team leader behind the lead, where they can exert greater control• follow the procedures for extended line search, modified as necessary. <p>This formation is suitable for open country searches where more than one team are working together.</p>

Searching for missing persons

Conduct a [reconnaissance search](#) in the area where the missing person might be found, including main tracks and routes, peaks, ridges, valleys, rivers, camp sites and huts. Any

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evidence of the person's whereabouts will indicate an "area of probability" for a general search.

The operation commander then allocates a search area to each team. Generally, this area should not take longer than two days to cover. Search areas should be defined by easily recognisable physical boundaries such as ridges, streams, tracks, bluffs, snow line and bush line. Undefined boundaries may result in errors.

Use [sweep searches](#):

- where signs of the missing person(s) are found
- to find evidence to confirm the missing party's movements
- when the missing person is almost certainly within a small area, e.g. when a child wanders into a pine plantation or gorse.

For searches in caves and mountains, see the [Search and Rescue operations](#) chapter in the Police Manual.

For information on missing persons investigations, see the [Missing persons](#) chapter in the Police Manual.

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Searching motor vehicles, ships and aircraft

Searching motor vehicles

This topic applies the same meaning of 'motor vehicles' as in section 2 of the Land Transport Act 1998, namely it means:

- a vehicle drawn or propelled by mechanical power; and
- includes a trailer; but
- does not include a:
 - vehicle running on rails; or
 - trailer (other than a trailer designed solely for the carriage of goods) that is designed and used exclusively as part of the armament of the New Zealand Defence Force; or
 - trailer running on one wheel and designed exclusively as a speed measuring device or for testing the wear of vehicle tyres; or
 - vehicle designed for amusement purposes and used exclusively within a place of recreation, amusement, or entertainment to which the public does not have access with motor vehicles; or
 - pedestrian-controlled machine; or
 - vehicle that the LTA has declared under section 168A is not a motor vehicle; or
 - mobility device.

Search areas

Motor vehicles are divided into three search areas:

- the front
- the interior, and
- the rear.

Searching procedures

Follow these steps to search a motor vehicle.

Step	Action
1	Examine each area fully before moving on to the next, using a mirror in places that are inaccessible.
2	If you are searching alone, search one side of the vehicle at a time. Work from front to back, then along the other side to the front again. Repeat the process from the opposite side of the vehicle.
3	In a two-person search, take one side of the vehicle each. Proceed as above, but without repeating the process. In this way, each person checks the other's work.
The front	
4	Information withheld
5	Information withheld.
The interior	
6	Information withheld
7	Information withheld
8	Examine every item found in the vehicle.
The rear	
9	Information withheld
10	Examine every item found in the boot.

Searching ships

Only people thoroughly familiar with the craft can achieve a detailed search. Naval vessels can be effectively searched by the crew, but merchant vessels may have problems of passenger control and less disciplined searchers.

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If Police must be involved, search the public areas first, then the compartments, one deck at a time in the usual pattern. Divers should check the hull, propellers, and steering gear.

Seek specialist advice.

Searching aircraft

Large aircraft are best searched by maintenance and aircrew personnel, who are familiar with their construction and equipment. Others can conduct only a superficial search. All such searches must be conducted in the presence of aircraft engineers.

However, if maintenance and aircrew personnel are not available, or in the case of smaller aircraft, searchers should search:

Information withheld.

Seek specialist advice.

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