

BELL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
BELL COUNTY, TEXAS
IN RE: COURTHOUSE SECURITY

I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

WHEREAS, threats and acts of violence directed at the general public, witnesses, jurors, litigants, lawyers, court personnel and judges demonstrate the need for security at the Bell County Courts Complex and at all courthouse satellites. The Texas Penal Code Sec. 46.03 prohibits all persons, with the exception of those specifically enumerated in section II below, from carrying or possessing firearms, weapons or destructive devices, in the courts complex or any courthouse satellite (hereinafter collectively referred to as the "courthouse") in Bell County. This section prohibits all persons from carrying or being in possession of any other device(s) or instrument(s) that could be used or perceived to be used as a physical threat to persons, or property, in the Courthouse/satellites in Bell County. Prohibitions may include but are not limited to pocket knives, ammunition, fireworks, caustic or flammable liquids. The court empowers the Bell County Sheriff's Office to stop all persons entering the courthouse, with the exception of those persons specifically enumerated in the section II below, and condition the right of entry upon the entrant's willingness to submit to a search of their person and/or personal effects to include purses, pocketbooks, briefcases, containers, packages, pagers, cellular phones and any other electronic device deemed necessary by the security detail. All persons refusing to submit to a search shall be denied access to the courthouse. Searches shall be conducted through the least intrusive means practicable. The purpose at the search is to insure the safety of the users and occupants of the courthouse. Violations of criminal statutes will result in the immediate notification of law enforcement so that an arrest and seizure may be effectuated.

II. EXEMPT PERSON

A. Peace Officers and Special Investigators as defined by Texas C.C.P. Art. 2.122 shall be exempt from the prohibition against carrying a firearm into a courthouse or any of the satellites. However, no Law Enforcement Officer may enter the Courthouse or any of its Satellites in possession of a firearm for any purpose other than in the course and scope of the officer's official duties. At no time may any Law Enforcement Officer possess a firearm within the Courthouse or any of its

Satellites when off-duty or for any private or personal purpose. All non-uniform and/or plain clothes law enforcement officers shall be required to present his/her official identification prior to entry into the courthouse. Any officer not presenting official identification shall be prohibited from possessing a firearm within the courthouse. This exemption only applies to Law Enforcement Officers who are entering the Courthouse to fulfill their official law enforcement duties.

The Courthouse security officers shall be required to maintain a log for all non-uniform and/or plain clothes law enforcement officers in possession of a firearm and shall be required to cause all non-uniformed and/or plain clothes to register immediately upon entry to the Courthouse. The law enforcement officer's reason for entry to the Courthouse shall be recorded. The Bell County Sheriff's officer may in his/her discretion allow that law enforcement officer to possess a firearm within the Courthouse or to require the firearm to be secured prior to entering the courthouse.

III. NONEXEMPT PERSONS

A. No one shall be permitted to carry any weapon into the courthouse or its satellites unless the person is specifically exempted under section II (A).

B. All law enforcement officers who are authorized to carry firearms as part of their official duties, are prohibited from carrying a firearm into the courthouse or its satellites, when the law enforcement officer is a party to the proceeding and not appearing in an official capacity. See Court Order issued by the District Administrative Judge attached. Any attempt to circumvent the above Order may be deemed a violation of a Court Order.

IV. ADMISSION SEARCHES

A. Any person desiring to enter the courthouse or any of its Satellites shall enter through authorized entrances and shall pass through a magnetometer (metal detector) where provided.

B. Any person who activates the metal detector must empty his or her pockets and pass through the device a second time. If, after the second pass through, the metal detector is again activated, the person shall be subject to a security search to identify all objects which activated the metal detector.

C. Prior to passing through the metal detector, any person carrying a package, briefcase, container, purse, pocketbook, pager, cellular phone or any other electronic device shall place such items on the X-ray conveyor belt and/or shall submit it to the security detail for visual inspection up to and including activation, if applicable.

D. Should the X-ray machine disclose what may be a weapon the container shall be subject to a manual search.

E. The examiner shall not read any written material disclosed during a search.

F. If Illegal firearms, weapons, destructive devices or contraband, as defined above, are discovered during a search, the appropriate law enforcement authority shall be notified immediately so that an arrest and seizure might be effectuated.

G. Attorneys with the proper Bell County Attorney Badges are exempt(*) from section IV.

*This exemption is extended to include all briefcases, files, and other equipment, in the possession of the attorney, necessary to conduct official business while at the Bell County Courts Building or any satellite court facilities. This modification of the privilege shall not be extended to members of the attorney's staff, witnesses, plaintiffs, or other individuals accompanying the properly credentialed attorney.

*THIS EXEMPTION MAY BE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED OR REVOKED BY THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE DURING HEIGHTENED SECURITY LEVELS OR AT RANDOM TIMES.

*revision 11-08-10

H. At the direction of the Court Security Supervisor, secondary checks will be conducted of individuals entering individual courtrooms. This screening will be of all persons entering the courtroom public entrance, including all credentialed attorneys and belongings exempted under Section IV(G) above. These screenings will be random and unannounced.

*revision 01-12-12

V. LAW ENFORCEMENT WITHIN THE COURTHOUSE

A. Any person or persons engaged in any activity which is perceived to be a threat to the safety of persons or property within the Courthouse or its satellites, or which disrupts the

official business conducted within the Courthouse or its satellites, or which constitutes a violation of a Texas Statute, Bell County ordinance or other municipal ordinance shall be subject to ejection from the Courthouse or its satellites upon order of a duly authorized law enforcement officer.

B. Any person or persons failing to immediately exit the Courthouse or its satellites upon order of a duly authorized law enforcement officer pursuant to V(A) of this order, shall be subject to arrest.

VI. PACKAGES AND LETTERS

A. All packages and letters entering the Bell County Courthouse or any of its Satellites shall either pass through a metal detector or be inspected. In the case of boxes of materials and supplies delivered through the courthouse loading dock, the inspection shall be to ensure that the integrity of the carton has not been compromised. If a carton appears to have been opened and resealed, the carton shall be inspected to ensure that no firearms, weapons or destructive devices have been placed in the carton.

B. If illegal firearms, weapons, destructive devices or contraband, as defined above, are discovered during a search, the appropriate law enforcement authority shall be notified immediately so that an arrest and seizure may be effectuated.

VII. NOTICE

The following notice shall be posted in a conspicuous place at all Courthouse entrances: "FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE PUBLIC, ALL PERSONS ENTERING THESE PREMISES MUST PASS THROUGH THE MAGNETOMETER (METAL DETECTOR). IF THE DETECTOR REGISTERS, THAT PERSON WILL BE SUBJECT TO A LIMITED SEARCH. ALL PACKAGES, BRIEFCASES, POCKETBOOKS OR OTHER ITEMS CARRIED BY A PERSON MUST BE OFFERED FOR INSPECTION IF SUCH PERSON WISHES TO ENTER THE BUILDING. ALL WEAPONS, INCLUDING LEGALLY-AUTHORIZED FIREARMS, MUST BE REMOVED AND SECURED PRIOR TO GAINING ENTRY INTO THE BELL COUNTY COURTS COMPLEX. ILLEGAL WEAPONS OR OTHER CONTRABAND DISCOVERED IN THE COURSE OF THESE SEARCH PROCEDURES WILL BE SEIZED."