

## 15.1 General Approach

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## 15.1 General Approach

### A. Five Basic Steps

This chapter outlines a five-step approach for analyzing typical “street encounters” with police. It covers situations involving both pedestrians and occupants of vehicles. This chapter does not attempt to catalogue the many decisions issued each year by the courts. Rather, it highlights the major principles at each step of the analysis for warrantless police encounters.

For a fuller discussion of warrantless searches and seizures, see WAYNE R. LAFAVE, *SEARCH AND SEIZURE: A TREATISE ON THE FOURTH AMENDMENT* (6th ed. 2020) [hereinafter LAFAVE, *SEARCH AND SEIZURE*] and ROBERT L. FARB, *ARREST, SEARCH, AND INVESTIGATION IN NORTH CAROLINA* (UNC School of Government, 5th ed. 2016) [hereinafter FARB]. Additional resources on North Carolina law are: SHEA RIGGSBEE DENNING, CHRISTOPHER TYNER & JEFFREY B. WELTY, *PULLED OVER: THE LAW OF TRAFFIC STOPS AND OFFENSES IN NORTH CAROLINA* (UNC School of Government, 2017); Jeff Welty, [Traffic Stops](#) (UNC School of Government, Mar. 2013) [hereinafter Welty, *Traffic Stops*] (reviewing permissible grounds for and actions during traffic stop); and Jeffrey B. Welty, [Motor Vehicle Checkpoints](#), ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE BULLETIN No. 2010/04 (UNC School of Government, Sept. 2010) [hereinafter Welty, *Motor Vehicle Checkpoints*].

The five steps are:

1. Did the officer seize the defendant?
2. Did the officer have grounds for the seizure?
3. Did the officer act within the scope of the seizure?
4. Did the officer have grounds to arrest or search?
5. Did the officer act within the scope of the arrest or search?

Generally, if an officer lacks authorization at any particular step, evidence uncovered by the officer as a result of the unauthorized action is subject to suppression. A flowchart outlining these steps is attached to this chapter as Appendix 15-1.

## **B. Authority to Act without Warrant**

In many (although not all) of the situations described in this chapter, an officer may act without first obtaining a warrant. The courts have long expressed a preference, however, for the use of both arrest and search warrants—even in situations where a warrant is not required. *See State v. Hardy*, 339 N.C. 207, 226 (1994) (“search and seizure of property unaccompanied by prior judicial approval in the form of a warrant is per se unreasonable unless the search falls within a well-delineated exception to warrant requirement”); *State v. Nixon*, 160 N.C. App. 31, 34–35 (2003), *relying on Aguilar v. Texas*, 378 U.S. 108, 110–11 (1964) (“informed and deliberate determinations of magistrates . . . are to be preferred over the hurried action of officers” (citation omitted)), *abrogated on other grounds by Illinois v. Gates*, 462 U.S. 213 (1983); *see also Flippo v. West Virginia*, 528 U.S. 11, 13 (1999) (court states that “warrantless search by the police is invalid unless it falls within one of the narrow and well-delineated exceptions to the warrant requirement”; court rejects any “homicide crime scene” exception to warrant requirement); *United States v. Ventresca*, 380 U.S. 102, 106 (1965) (“in a doubtful or marginal case a search under a warrant may be sustainable where without one it would fall”); *Beck v. Ohio*, 379 U.S. 89, 96 (1964) (“arrest without a warrant bypasses the safeguards provided by an objective predetermination of probable cause”).

## **C. Effect of Constitutional and State Law Violations**

Most of this chapter deals with violations of the U.S. Constitution, for which the remedy is suppression of evidence that is unconstitutionally obtained.

To the extent it provides greater protection, state constitutional law provides a basis for suppression of illegally obtained evidence. In the search and seizure context, the North Carolina courts have found that protections under the North Carolina Constitution differ from federal constitutional protections in limited instances. *See State v. Carter*, 322 N.C. 709 (1988) (rejecting good faith exception to exclusionary rule under state constitution); *see also supra* “Good faith exception for constitutional violations not valid in North Carolina” in § 14.2B, Search Warrants (discussing case law and impact of recent legislation). Several states have recognized additional circumstances in which their state constitutions provide greater protections than under the U.S. Constitution. Examples are cited in this chapter. North Carolina defense counsel should remain alert to opportunities for differentiating the North Carolina Constitution from more limited federal protections and should be cognizant of the need to argue violations under both the state and federal constitutions.

Unlike the good faith exception for federal constitutional violations, North Carolina has adopted other exceptions to the exclusionary rule, whereby even illegally obtained evidence may nonetheless be admissible. These include the attenuation doctrine, reasonable, inevitable discovery, and independent source doctrine, among others. Counsel should be familiar with these and other common exceptions when preparing suppression arguments. Exceptions to the exclusionary rule are discussed *supra* in Chapter 14, Suppression Motions.

Substantial statutory violations also may warrant suppression under Section 15A-974 of the North Carolina General Statutes (hereinafter G.S.). In 2011, the N.C. General Assembly amended G.S. 15A-974, effective for trials and hearings commencing on or after July 1, 2011, to provide a good-faith exception to the exclusionary rule for statutory violations. *See* G.S. 15A-974(a)(2). For a further discussion of statutory violations and the effect of the 2011 legislation, see *supra* “Good faith exception for constitutional violations not valid in North Carolina” in § 14.2B, Search Warrants, and § 14.5, Substantial Violations of Criminal Procedure Act.

Violations of other states’ laws, not based on federal constitutional requirements or North Carolina law, generally do not provide a basis for suppression. *See State v. Hernandez*, 208 N.C. App. 591, 604 (2010) (declining to suppress evidence for violation of New Jersey state constitution); *see also Virginia v. Moore*, 553 U.S. 164 (2008) (Virginia law enforcement officers who had probable cause to arrest defendant for a misdemeanor did not violate Fourth Amendment when they arrested him and conducted search incident to arrest although state law did not authorize an arrest); *cf. State v. Stitt*, 201 N.C. App. 233 (2009) (even if State did not fully comply with 18 U.S.C. 2703(d) of the Stored Communications Act in obtaining records pertaining to cell phones possessed by defendant, federal law did not provide for suppression remedy).