

LICENSING & REGULATION DIVISION

QUICK GUIDE



THE SIKH KIRPAN: Information for Security Officers

The purpose of this quick guide is to give Security Officers a better understanding of the Sikh Faith, in particular the possession of a “Kirpan”. In Victoria the Kirpan (sword) may be observed being carried by Sikhs in places where Security Officers are performing duties which include screening entry or otherwise maintaining order in public places.

SIKHS

Sikhs do not have any specific documentation that verifies their status as an initiated Sikh. Initiation is voluntary and both males and females can become initiated at any age. Initiated Sikhs maintain five articles of faith, sometimes referred as the ‘five Ks’:

- Kachera: a special undergarment;
- Kanga: a small wooden comb to comb his or her hair;
- Kara: an iron bangle;
- Keshas: a Sikh must not cut Keshas (hair) from his/her body; and
- **Kirpan**: a small sized sword placed in a shoulder belt. Kirpans worn in this manner are usually approximately 6 inches long, but ceremonial kirpans may be a few metres long.

A requirement for initiated male Sikhs is that they carry a Kirpan on their person at all times. The Kirpan, usually blunted, is generally concealed beneath clothing against the person’s body in a sheath and strap.

EXEMPTION UNDER SECTION 8B CONTROL OF WEAPONS ACT 1990

Security Officers may come into contact with a person carrying a Kirpan whilst on duty and it would be recommended to be familiar with the following legislation that covers the possession of Kirpans.

The Governor in Council, under section 8B of the *Controls of Weapons Act 1990*, exempts from the operation of section 5(1) and section (1A) of the *Control of Weapons Act 1990*, in relation to kirpans (swords), a person who is of persons set out in (i) to the extent specified in (ii):

- i) A Sikh whose religious practices requires the carrying and possession of a kirpan (a specific type of sword);
- ii) Bringing a kirpan into Victoria, causing a kirpan to be brought into or sent into Victoria; selling or purchasing a kirpan; displaying or advertising a kirpan for sale; possessing, using or carrying a kirpan – for the purposes of the performance of duties associated with religious observance.



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In brief, this exemption means that it is not an offence under the *Control of Weapons Act 1990* for a Sikh person to carry a kirpan in public on the basis that they carry it out of religious observance. However, if there are any circumstances where Security Officers might have public safety concerns, please refer the issue to Victoria Police.

EXAMPLES OF SIKH KIRPANS



RESTRICTIONS IN THE SIKH FAITH REGARDING PHYSICAL CONTACT

- Sikh males normally handshake with other males, but in the case of Sikh females the preferred way is to greet a male with folded hands and vice versa;
- Touching a person of the opposite sex may be seen as offensive;
- Only family or religious members can touch a Sikh woman even when she is grieving over a death. Touching a Sikh woman by a male who is not close family member is not approved;
- If a Sikh is asked to remove his or her turban, it is preferred, if possible, that he or she be given a private room and mirror with which to remove, and later restore, the turban.

SIKHISM RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria, at www.sikhinterfaithvic.org.au
- Sikhnet, at www.sikhnet.com

Australasian Police (Multicultural Advisory Bureau) A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity for Operational Police and Emergency Services – 2nd Edition.

ANZPAA (Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency) A Practical Reference to Religious and Spiritual Diversity for Operational Police – 3rd Edition.