



Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

1971 CHAPTER 38

Law enforcement and punishment of offences

23 Powers to search and obtain evidence.

- (1) A constable or other person authorised in that behalf by a general or special order of the Secretary of State (or in Northern Ireland either of the Secretary of State or the Ministry of Home Affairs for Northern Ireland) shall, for the purposes of the execution of this Act, have power to enter the premises of a person carrying on business as a producer or supplier of any controlled drugs and to demand the production of, and to inspect, any books or documents relating to dealings in any such drugs and to inspect any stocks of any such drugs.
- (2) If a constable has reasonable grounds to suspect that any person is in possession of a controlled drug in contravention of this Act or of any regulations [^{F1}or orders] made thereunder, the constable may—
 - (a) search that person, and detain him for the purpose of searching him;
 - (b) search any vehicle or vessel in which the constable suspects that the drug may be found, and for that purpose require the person in control of the vehicle or vessel to stop it;
 - (c) seize and detain, for the purposes of proceedings under this Act, anything found in the course of the search which appears to the constable to be evidence of an offence under this Act.

In this subsection “vessel” includes a hovercraft within the meaning of the ^{M1}Hovercraft Act 1968; and nothing in this subsection shall prejudice any power of search or any power to seize or detain property which is exercisable by a constable apart from this subsection.

- (3) If a justice of the peace (or in Scotland a justice of the peace, a magistrate or a sheriff) is satisfied by information on oath that there is reasonable ground for suspecting—
 - (a) that any controlled drugs are, in contravention of this Act or of any regulations [^{F2}or orders] made thereunder, in the possession of a person on any premises;or

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- (b) that a document directly or indirectly relating to, or connected with, a transaction or dealing which was, or an intended transaction or dealing which would if carried out be, an offence under this Act, or in the case of a transaction or dealing carried out or intended to be carried out in a place outside the United Kingdom, an offence against the provisions of a corresponding law in force in that place, is in the possession of a person on any premises,

he may grant a warrant authorising any constable ^{F3}... at any time or times within one month from the date of the warrant, to enter, if need be by force, the premises named in the warrant, and to search the premises and any persons found therein and, if there is reasonable ground for suspecting that an offence under this Act has been committed in relation to any controlled drugs found on the premises or in the possession of any such persons, or that a document so found is such a document as is mentioned in paragraph (b) above, to seize and detain those drugs or that document, as the case may be.

[^{F4}(3A) The powers conferred by subsection (1) above shall be exercisable also for the purposes of the execution of Part II of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 ^{F5}... [^{F6}or Article 47 of the Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996] and subsection (3) above (excluding paragraph (a)) shall apply also to offences under section 12 or 13 of that Act [^{F7}of 1990], taking references in those provisions to controlled drugs as references to scheduled substances within the meaning of that Part.]

- (4) A person commits an offence if he—
- (a) intentionally obstructs a person in the exercise of his powers under this section; or
 - (b) conceals from a person acting in the exercise of his powers under subsection (1) above any such books, documents, stocks or drugs as are mentioned in that subsection; or
 - (c) without reasonable excuse (proof of which shall lie on him) fails to produce any such books or documents as are so mentioned where their production is demanded by a person in the exercise of his power under that subsection.

^{F8}(5)

Textual Amendments

- F1** Words in s. 23(2) inserted (15.11.2011) by Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (c. 13), s. 157(1), **Sch. 17 para. 15(2)**; S.I. 2011/2515, art. 3(g)
- F2** Words in s. 23(3)(a) inserted (15.11.2011) by Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (c. 13), s. 157(1), **Sch. 17 para. 15(3)**; S.I. 2011/2515, art. 3(g)
- F3** Words in s. 23(3) repealed (12.11.2009) by Policing and Crime Act 2009 (c. 26), ss. 111(2), 116(5)(c), **Sch. 8 Pt. 12**
- F4** S. 23(3A) inserted (1.7.1991) by Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 (c. 5, SIF 39:1), s. 23(4); S.I. 1991/1072, art. 2, **Sch. Pt. II**
- F5** Words in s. 23(3A) repealed (24.2.2003) by Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (c. 29), s. 458(1), **Sch. 12**; S.I. 2003/120, art. 2, **Sch.** (with arts. 34) (as amended (20.2.2003) by S.I. 2003/333, art. 14)
- F6** Words in s. 23(3A) inserted (25.8.1996) by S.I. 1996/1299 (N.I. 9), art. 57(1), **Sch. 3 para. 2**
- F7** Words in s. 23(3A) inserted (3.2.1995) by 1994 c. 37, s. 65, **Sch. 1 para. 4(b)**
- F8** S. 23(5) repealed (12.11.2009) by Policing and Crime Act 2009 (c. 26), ss. 111(3), 116(5)(c), **Sch. 8 Pt. 12**

Changes to legislation: There are currently no known outstanding effects for the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, Cross Heading: Law enforcement and punishment of offences. (See end of Document for details)

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C1** Functions of Ministry of Home Affairs for Northern Ireland transferred to Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland by S.R. & O. (N.I.) 1973 No. 504, art. 5, **Sch. 2 Pt. I**
- C2** S. 23(1)(3) extended (with modifications) (6.10.1993) by S.I. 1993/2166, **reg. 8(2)**.
- C3** S. 23(1)(3) extended (with modifications) (7.3.2008) by **Controlled Drugs (Drug Precursors) (Community External Trade) Regulations 2008** (S.I. 2008/296), regs. 1(1), **10**
- C4** S. 23(1)(3) extended (with modifications) (7.3.2008) by **Controlled Drugs (Drug Precursors) (Intra-Community Trade) Regulations 2008** (S.I. 2008/295), regs. 1(1), **8**
- C5** S. 23(2)(3) powers of seizure extended (1.4.2003) by **Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001** (c. 16), ss. 50, 138(2), **Sch. 1 para. 14** (with ss. 52-54, 68); S.I. 2003/708, art. 2(a)
- C6** S. 23(2)(3) powers of seizure extended (1.4.2003) by **Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001** (c. 16), ss. 51, 138(2), **Sch. 1 para. 77** (with ss. 52-54, 68); S.I. 2003/708, art. 2(a)
- C7** S. 23(3)(3A) modified by 2002 c. 30, Sch. 4 para. 16B (as inserted (E.W.) (1.7.2005) by **Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005** (c. 15), s. 178(8), **Sch. 8 para. 14**; S.I. 2005/1521, art. 3(1)(i))
- C8** S. 23(3)(3A) modified by 2003 c. 6, Sch. 2 para. 2B (as inserted (N.I.) (22.4.2007) by **The Policing (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 2007** (S.I. 2007/912 (N.I. 6)), art. 1(3), **Sch. 1 para. 2**)
- C9** S. 23(3) extended (with modifications) (7.3.2008) by **Controlled Drugs (Drug Precursors) (Intra-Community Trade) Regulations 2008** (S.I. 2008/295), regs. 1(1), **8**

Marginal Citations

- M1** 1968 c. 59.

[^{F9}23A Temporary class drugs: further power to search, seize and detain

- (1) Subsection (3) applies in any case where—
 - (a) a constable has reasonable grounds to suspect that a person (“P”) is in possession of a temporary class drug, and
 - (b) it does not appear to the constable that a power under section 23(2) applies to the case.
- (2) But if any provision has been made by virtue of section 7A(2)(c) (excepted possession) that applies to the temporary class drug in question, subsection (3) applies only if the constable has no reason to believe that P’s possession of the drug is to be treated as excepted possession for the purposes of this Act.
- (3) The constable may—
 - (a) search P, and detain P for the purposes of searching P;
 - (b) search any vehicle or vessel in which the constable suspects that the drug may be found, and for that purpose require the person in control of the vehicle or vessel to stop it;
 - (c) seize and detain anything found in the course of the search which appears to the constable to be a temporary class drug or to be evidence of an offence under this Act.

In this subsection, “vessel” has the same meaning as in section 23(2).

- (4) Subsection (5) applies if a constable reasonably believes that anything detained under subsection (3)(c) is a temporary class drug but is not evidence of any offence under this Act.
- (5) The constable may dispose of the drug in such manner as the constable thinks appropriate.

Changes to legislation: There are currently no known outstanding effects for the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, Cross Heading: Law enforcement and punishment of offences. (See end of Document for details)

- (6) A person who intentionally obstructs a constable in the exercise of the constable's powers under subsection (3) commits an offence.]

Textual Amendments

- F9** S. 23A inserted (15.11.2011) by [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 \(c. 13\), s. 157\(1\), Sch. 17 para. 16](#); S.I. 2011/2515, art. 3(g)

^{F10F11}24 Power of arrest

.....

Textual Amendments

- F10** S. 24 repealed (E.W.) by virtue of [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(c. 60, SIF 95, 47\)](#), s. 119, [Sch. 7 Pt. I](#) and s. 24 repealed (N.I.) by S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I. 12), art. 90(2)(3), [Sch. 7 Pt. I](#)
- F11** S. 24 repealed (S.) (25.1.2018) by [The Criminal Justice \(Scotland\) Act 2016 \(Consequential and Supplementary Modifications\) Regulations 2017 \(S.S.I. 2017/452\)](#), reg. 1, [sch. para. 8](#)

25 Prosecution and punishment of offences.

- (1) Schedule 4 to this Act shall have effect, in accordance with subsection (2) below, with respect to the way in which offences under this Act are punishable on conviction.
- (2) In relation to an offence under a provision of this Act specified in the first column of the Schedule (the general nature of the offence being described in the second column)—
- (a) the third column shows whether the offence is punishable on summary conviction or on indictment or in either way;
 - (b) the fourth, fifth and sixth columns show respectively the punishments which may be imposed on a person convicted of the offence in the way specified in relation thereto in the third column (that is to say, summarily or on indictment) according to whether the controlled drug in relation to which the offence was committed was a Class A drug, a Class B drug or a Class C drug; and
 - (c) the seventh column shows the punishments which may be imposed on a person convicted of the offence in the way specified in relation thereto in the third column (that is to say, summarily or on indictment), whether or not the offence was committed in relation to a controlled drug and, if it was so committed, irrespective of whether the drug was a Class A drug, a Class B drug or a Class C drug;

and in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh columns a reference to a period gives the maximum term of imprisonment and a reference to a sum of money the maximum fine.

[^{F12}(2A) Subsection (2B) applies if an offence specified in the first column of Schedule 4 is committed in relation to a temporary class drug.

- (2B) The punishments which may be imposed on a person convicted of the offence summarily or (as the case may be) on indictment in relation to the temporary class drug are the same as those which could be imposed had the person been convicted of the offence in that way in relation to a Class B drug (see the fifth column of Schedule 4).]

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- (3) An offence under section 19 of this Act shall be punishable on summary conviction, on indictment or in either way according to whether, under Schedule 4 to this Act, the substantive offence is punishable on summary conviction, in indictment or in either way; and the punishments which may be imposed on a person convicted of an offence under that section are the same as those which, under that Schedule, may be imposed on a person convicted of the substantive offence.

In this subsection “the substantive offence” means the offence under this Act to which [^{F13}the attempt or, as the case may be], the incitement [^{F13}or attempted incitement] mentioned in section 19 was directed.

- [^{F14}(3A) The punishments which may be imposed on a person convicted of an offence under section 23A(6) are the same as those which, under Schedule 4, may be imposed on a person convicted of an offence under section 23(4).]

- (4) Notwithstanding anything in [^{F15}section 127(1) of the Magistrates’ Courts Act 1980], a magistrates’ court in England and Wales may try an information for an offence under this Act if the information was laid at any time within twelve months from the commission of the offence.

- (5) Notwithstanding anything in [^{F16}section 331 of the ^{M2}Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975] (limitation of time for proceedings in statutory offences) summary proceedings in Scotland for an offence under this Act may be commenced at any time within twelve months from the time when the offence was committed, and subsection (2) of the said section 23 shall apply for the purposes of this subsection as it applies for the purposes of that section.

- (6) Notwithstanding anything in [^{F17}Article 19(1) of the Magistrates’ Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1981], a magistrates’ court in Northern Ireland may hear and determine a complaint for an offence under [^{F18}section 17(3) of] this Act if the complaint was made at any time within twelve months from the commission of the offence.

Textual Amendments

- F12** S. 25(2A)(2B) inserted (15.11.2011) by Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (c. 13), s. 157(1), **Sch. 17 para. 17(2)**; S.I. 2011/2515, art. 3(g)
- F13** Words repealed (E.W.) by Criminal Attempts Act 1981 (c. 47, SIF 39:1), **Sch. Pt. I** and (N.I.) by S.I. 1983/1120 (N.I. 13), **Sch.**
- F14** S. 25(3A) inserted (15.11.2011) by Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (c. 13), s. 157(1), **Sch. 17 para. 17(3)**; S.I. 2011/2515, art. 3(g)
- F15** Words substituted by Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 (c. 43, SIF 82), s. 154, **Sch. 7 para. 102**
- F16** Words substituted by virtue of Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 (c. 21), **s. 460(1)(b)**
- F17** Words commencing “Article 19(1)” substituted (N.I.) for words commencing “section 34” by S.I. 1981/1675 (N.I. 26), **Sch. 6 Pt. I para. 20**
- F18** Words inserted by S.I. 1980/704, **Sch. 1 Pt. II para. 60**

Marginal Citations

- M2** 1975 c. 21.

^{F19}26

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Textual Amendments

F19 S. 26 repealed by [Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 \(c. 2, SIF 39:1\)](#), **Sch. 6 Pt. I**

27 Forfeiture.

- (1) Subject to subsection (2) below, the court by or before which a person is convicted of an offence under this Act [^{F20}or [^{F21}an offence falling within subsection (3) below]] [^{F22}or an offence to which section 1 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1987 relates] [^{F23}or a drug trafficking offence, as defined in Article 2(2) of the [^{F24}Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996]] may order anything shown to the satisfaction of the court to relate to the offence, to be forfeited and either destroyed or dealt with in such other manner as the court may order.
- (2) The court shall not order anything to be forfeited under this section, where a person claiming to be the owner of or otherwise interested in it applies to be heard by the court, unless an opportunity has been given to him to show cause why the order should not be made.
- [^{F25}(3) An offence falls within this subsection if it is an offence which is specified in—
- (a) paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 to the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (drug trafficking offences), or
 - (b) so far as it relates to that paragraph, paragraph 10 of that Schedule.]

Textual Amendments

- F20** Words inserted (E.W.) by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\)](#), ss. 70, 123, **Sch. 8 para. 16**
- F21** Words in s. 27(1) substituted (24.3.2003) by [Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 \(c. 29\)](#), s. 458(1), **Sch. 11 para. 5(2)**; [S.I. 2003/333](#), art. 2, Sch.
- F22** Words inserted (1.7.1991) by [Criminal Justice \(International Co-operation\) Act 1990 \(c. 5, SIF 39:1\)](#), s. 31(1), **Sch. 4 para. 1**; [S.I. 1991/1072](#), art. 2, **Sch. Pt. II**
- F23** Words in s. 27(1) inserted (9.1.1995) by [S.I. 1994/2795 \(N.I. 15\)](#), art. 13; [S.R. 1994 No. 446](#), art. 2
- F24** Words in s. 27(1) substituted (25.8.1996) by [S.I. 1996/1299 \(N.I. 9\)](#), art. 57(1), **Sch. 3 para. 3**
- F25** S. 27(3) inserted (24.3.2003) by [Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 \(c. 29\)](#), s. 458(1), **Sch. 11 para. 5(3)**; [S.I. 2003/333](#), art. 2, Sch.

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C10** S. 27 restricted (E.W.) by [Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 \(c. 32, SIF 39:1\)](#), s. 1(5)(b)(iii)
s. 27 restricted (E.W.) (3.2.1995) by [1994 c. 37](#), ss. 2(5)(b)(iii), 20(1)(a)(iii)(with s. 66(2))
- C11** S. 27 restricted by [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(c. 33, SIF 39:1\)](#), ss. 72(5)(c), 123, **Sch. 8 para. 6**

Changes to legislation:

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