

What Happened During the Downing Centre Machete Scare?

Sydney's Downing Centre Court complex was [placed in lockdown late last month](#), after a man walked inside carrying a large black machete.

The man in his 20s, was seen walking over from nearby Hyde Park, where it is believed he was involved in an altercation, before entering the court at around 10am and allegedly yelling at people to "get on the ground".

A few minutes later, he was lying in the ground, surrounded by police officers. During the incident, a police officer drew her gun and pointed it at the man.

"That's when I decided I was going down on to the floor," a staff member told AAP.

During the incident, those in the building were told to stay on the ground, with some choosing to hide under their desks for added safety.

Moments later three police arrived, handcuffed the young man and marched him from the building, putting him in the back of a police wagon and driving off.

A police spokeswoman yesterday said Sheriff's officers, who are responsible for court security, had called for backup when the man, 20, began yelling and ordering people to the ground.

The lockdown meant that all doors to the court were locked, but police did not start evacuating the building because the situation was quickly brought under control. The doors were reopened shortly after the arrest, and hearings had resumed as normal by 11am.

Police told the [Daily Telegraph](#) the man would undergo a mental

health assessment before they considered laying charges.

Increased Security at the Downing Centre

This is not the first time security has become an issue at the Downing Centre. The courthouse has been a target in the past, due to the heated nature of many cases.

Last year, the court was swarmed by members of the New South Wales riot squad and tactical officer units, following a tip-off that that a [“disruption” was going to occur at a trial](#). The proceedings concerned an armed robbery that allegedly occurred outside Broadway Shopping Centre in 2013. According to the tip, the defendant’s associates were planning to perform a drive-by shooting outside the court.

Currently, everyone coming into the courthouse is required to walk through a metal detector, and have their bags x-rayed, before being allowed entry into the complex. Last year, the New South Wales Government [beefed-up security at the Downing Centre](#) by providing it with additional Sheriff’s Officers as part of their counterterrorism measures.

The Sheriffs are responsible for court security, scanning those entering the complex and confiscating prohibited items, requesting identification, and [arresting anyone who commits violent or contemptuous acts](#).

Sheriff’s Officers were given greater powers of arrest last year, after [Ali Hussein Chahine jumped the dock](#) at the Downing Centre in October and assaulted two corrective services officers before escaping barefoot on a bus.

New South Wales Attorney-General Gabrielle Upton said that change “will assist security officers to perform their role of protecting court personnel and court users more effectively.”

However, the Opposition has questioned the effectiveness of the new powers, as budget cuts have left courts across the

state with a massive shortfall in the number of sheriffs.

As of December last year, the Government only employed 230 Sheriffs to cover its 154 local courts, which require two officers per court per sitting day. According to Shadow Attorney-General Paul Lynch, some regional courts are being left without Sheriffs on duty, leaving them vulnerable to attack.

Things to Keep in Mind if Going to Court

Security officers have the [power to confiscate](#) anything they believe is a restricted item or offensive implement. 'Offensive implement' covers a very broad category, including anything that could be used to cause damage or injury to a person.

Although it might seem a bit over-the-top, this means they can confiscate many things that you might not consider to be a threat. Examples include keychain pocket knives and scissors.

It is an offence to film or take photos inside a courthouse without permission. Security officers are permitted to [confiscate any recording device](#), including its film, along with anything else that's been used to unlawfully record. This is to protect the safety and identity of those involved in cases.

Sheriff's Officers may ask for your name and address, if this is unknown and if they believe on reasonable grounds that you are carrying a restricted item or have committed an offence. They are required to show their identification before exercising powers of confiscation. They're also required to provide the reasons for exercising power, and a warning that refusal to comply may be an offence.

Any confiscated items must either be returned to you when you leave the courthouse, unless they are deemed illegal and required as evidence.