



The Supreme Court on Monday gave police more leeway to break into residences in search of illegal drugs. The justices in an 8-1 decision said officers who loudly knock on a door and then hear sounds suggesting evidence is being destroyed may break down the door and enter without a search warrant.

Residents who "attempt to destroy evidence have only themselves to blame" when police burst in, said Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr.

In a lone dissent, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said she feared the ruling in a Kentucky case will give police an easy way to ignore the 4th Amendment. "Police officers may not knock, listen and then break the door down," she said, without violating the 4th Amendment.

In the past, the court has said police usually may not enter a home unless they have a search warrant or the permission of the owner. As Alito said, "The 4th Amendment has drawn a firm line at the entrance to the house."

One exception to that rule involves an emergency, such as screams coming from a house. Police may also pursue a fleeing suspect who enters a residence. Police were attempting to do that in the Kentucky case, but they entered the wrong apartment, raising the issue of what is permissible in situations where police have reason to believe evidence is being destroyed.

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