

Missing Person Investigations

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I. Purpose

The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines for investigating missing persons.

II. Policy

It is the policy of the Office of the Sheriff to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing persons. Additionally, the Office of the Sheriff holds that every person reported as missing will be considered at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.

III. Definitions

A. Family Abduction

A non-custodial family member flees with a child, usually in direct violation of a court ordered custody arrangement.

B. Missing Adult

A missing adult includes a person who is:

1. 18 years of age or older; and
2. Whose absence is contrary to his/her normal patterns of behavior and may be linked to unusual circumstances.

C. Missing Child

A missing child includes a person who is:

1. Younger than 18 years of age; and
2. Whose whereabouts is unknown by their parents or guardians.

D. Non-Family Abduction

A non-family abduction usually involves a child taken by an unknown individual through force or persuasion, usually in furtherance of additional victimization.

E. Runaway

A runaway is a child, most often a teenager, who leaves home voluntarily for a variety of reasons.

F. Unusual Circumstances

Unusual circumstances usually refer to:

1. A missing child 13 years of age or younger.

2. A child or an adult who is missing and believed to be one or more of the factors noted below:

a. Out of the zone of safety for his/her age and physical and mental condition.

b. Mentally diminished. If the person is developmentally disabled or emotionally disturbed, or the victim of disease, he/she may have difficulty communicating with others about needs, identity, or address.

c. Drug dependent.

d. A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation.

e. In a life-threatening situation.

f. Absent from home for more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement as missing.

g. Believed to be with persons who could endanger his/her welfare.

IV. Missing Child Investigations

A deputy receiving the report of a missing child will be responsible for:

A. Making personal contact with the complainant.

B. Determining if circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing child.

C. Obtaining sufficient information from the reporting party about the circumstances of the child's disappearance so that deputies may begin looking for the missing child as they're responding. Information should include the child's height, weight, hair and eye color, and clothing, as well as the location where last seen. The radio alert should contain any information known about a possible abductor with special

emphasis on the description of the suspect if applicable, and any vehicle used as well as direction of travel.

D. Ensuring that the Department of Emergency Services broadcasts a lookout to our agency and other allied law enforcement agencies.

E. Completing the State of Maryland Missing Persons Report and an offense/incident report in ICIS.

Note: The National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990 mandates law enforcement's immediate response to reports of missing children and the prompt entry of descriptive information into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File.

F. Conducting a thorough investigation and initiate appropriate intensive search procedures.

G. Conferring with the shift supervisor regarding a CIU investigator notification.

H. Providing for follow-up contact with the complainant no later than twelve (12) hours after the filing of the initial report to determine whether the person has been located.

V. Supervisor's Responsibilities

The deputy's immediate supervisor will be responsible for:

A. Determining and initiating, if appropriate upon conference with the initial investigating deputy, additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation, to include, but not limited to: Search and Rescue Dogs, helicopters, all-terrain vehicles, boats, Fire/EMS services, outside agencies, and news media releases.

B. Activating the Amber Alert system if appropriate. If circumstances indicate the chances for the child's safe recovery would be increased by immediate public awareness a supervisor will promptly implement such efforts.

VI. Amber Alert Activation

A. Amber Alert is a child abduction alert issued upon the suspected abduction of a child. Amber Alerts use a wide array of media outlets as well as variable message signs located on

highways to broadcast information about missing children.

B. An Amber Alert will be activated if:

1. The child is under 18 year of age and has been abducted.

2. The circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate the child is in serious danger of bodily harm or death.

3. There must be enough descriptive information about the child, abductor, and/or suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert would help.

C. The Amber Alert may be initiated by contacting the Maryland State Police Alert Coordinator. This contact information is maintained at the Duty Officer's desk and other locations in the building.

VII. Missing Adult Investigations

A deputy receiving the report of a missing adult will be responsible for:

A. Making personal contact with the complainant.

B. Determining if circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing adult.

C. Obtaining sufficient information from the reporting party about the circumstances of the person's disappearance so that deputies may begin looking for the missing person as they're responding. Information should include the person's height, weight, hair and eye color, and clothing, as well as the location where last seen. The radio alert should contain any information known about a possible abductor with special emphasis on the description of the suspect if applicable, and any vehicle used as well as direction of travel.

D. Ensuring that the Department of Emergency Services broadcasts a lookout to our agency and other allied law enforcement agencies.

E. Completing the State of Maryland Missing Persons Report and an offense/incident report in ICIS.

F. Conducting a thorough investigation and initiate appropriate intensive search procedures.

G. Conferring with the shift supervisor regarding a CIU investigator notification.

H. Providing for follow-up contact with the complainant no later than twelve (12) hours after the filing of the initial report to determine whether the person has been located.

I. Determining if an NCIC entry is applicable.

VIII. Silver Alert

A. A Silver Alert is a public notification system to broadcast information about missing persons, especially seniors with diminished mental abilities, in order to aid in their return. Silver Alerts use a wide array of media outlets as well as variable message signs located on highways to broadcast information about missing persons.

B. The Silver Alert program is patterned after the Amber Alert system and also requires that certain criteria be met to be activated. In order for an alert to be issued the following criteria must be met:

1. The missing person must suffer from a cognitive impairment, such as Alzheimer's or dementia;
2. The person's disappearance must pose a threat to the person's health and safety;
3. The missing person must be travelling in a vehicle and there must be descriptive information about the person and vehicle;
4. The requestor must have initiated a local alert;
5. The missing person has been entered into the National Crime Information Center system.

C. A Silver Alert may be initiated by contacting the Maryland State Police Alert Coordinator. This contact information is maintained at the Duty Officer's desk and other locations in the building.

IX. Follow-up Missing Persons Reports

A. The Duty Officer will ensure a twelve (12) hour follow-up is completed on each missing person that is still missing, prior to the end of the

initial twelve (12) hours of the Missing Person Report having been completed.

B. Follow-up activities may include, but are not limited to, contacting the complainant for additional information, contacting relatives, employers, schools, associates, places the missing person frequents, etc. The deputy will complete a Supplement Report upon completion of the follow-up documenting the investigation and results.

C. The deputy responsible for a follow-up will re-evaluate the NCIC entry criteria and determine whether or not the entry is appropriate based on any new information.

X. Closure / Cancellation

Whenever a missing person has been located, or a family member or other reliable source(s) has notified the Office of the Sheriff of his/her return, it is the responsibility of the deputy to:

A. Verify the return and the identity of the missing person (If the missing person is found in another jurisdiction the deputy can have the law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction make the verification).

B. Cancel any teletypes, lookouts, or NCIC entries.

C. Notify the appropriate investigator.

D. Advise the original complainant of the relevant details of the case and the subject's location. Deputies are cautioned that every case presents different problems and that discretion will be exercised in furnishing information.

E. Return any photographs in agency possession to the owner if previously requested.

F. Complete a supplement report.

G. In addition, the following will apply depending on individual circumstances:

1. If it is determined that the missing person has been the subject of foul play, or has been located either deceased or in severely deteriorated physical or mental condition, personal contact will be made with the complainant. In all other cases telephone contact will suffice.

2. In cases involving missing children located outside of Queen Anne's County, NCIC entries can only be canceled upon their return to this jurisdiction. To accomplish this, deputies will inform the guardian to contact the investigator upon return so the NCIC entry can be canceled. Exceptions may be made when the child's location and condition are verified through a law enforcement agency and the legal guardian grants permission for the child to remain in that location.

3. If a missing child returns home, and no foul play is suspected, the missing child can be canceled as stated above in this section and only the appropriate supplemental report is required.

XI. CALEA References: 41.2.5a, 41.2.5b, 41.2.5c, 41.2.5d, 41.2.5e, 41.2.5f, 41.2.6a, 41.2.6b, 41.2.6c, 41.2.6d, 41.2.6e & 41.2.6f.

XII. Proponent Unit: Field Operations Division.

XIII. Cancellation: None

Sheriff R. Gery Hofmann III