



Model Policy

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<i>Subject</i> Missing Persons			
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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons.

II. POLICY

Many missing person reports involve individuals who have voluntarily left home for personal reasons, while other reports are often unfounded or quickly resolved. However, there are many instances in which persons disappear for unexplained reasons and under circumstances where they may be considered at risk. The roles of the complaint taker and initial responding officer are critical in identifying the circumstances surrounding missing persons and in identifying those persons at risk. Therefore, it is the policy of this agency that (1) all reports of missing persons be given full consideration and attention by members of this agency to include careful recording and investigation of factual circumstances surrounding the disappearance in accordance with this policy, and (2) that particular care be exercised in instances involving missing children and those who may be mentally or physical impaired or others who are insufficiently prepared to take care of themselves.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Reporting/Classification of Missing Persons

1. There is no waiting period for reporting a missing person. Missing person reports shall be taken in-person or by telephone in conformance with the criteria of this policy and the criticality of the incident.

2. A person may be declared "missing" when his/her whereabouts is unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded by knowledgeable parties as highly unusual or suspicious in consideration of the subject's behavior patterns, plans or routines.
3. An individual may be considered "missing-critical" who meets the foregoing criteria and who, among other possible circumstances,:
 - a. may be the subject of foul play,
 - b. because of age (young or old), may be unable to properly safeguard or care for himself/herself,
 - c. suffers from diminished mental capacity or medical conditions that are potentially life threatening if left untreated/unattended;
 - d. is a patient of a mental institution and is considered potentially dangerous to himself or others;
 - e. has demonstrated the potential for suicide; or
 - f. may have been involved in a boating, swimming or other sporting accident or natural disaster.
4. Reports of juveniles who have voluntarily left home (i.e., "runaways") should be classified as such only after thorough investigation.
5. Based on the outcome of initial inquiries, a decision may be made concerning the potential danger posed to the missing person and the urgency of police response.

B. Initial Report Taking

1. The initial report taker must gather as much pertinent information as possible in order to properly classify a missing person report and initiate proper response. This includes the following information:
 - a. Name, age and physical description of the subject and relationship of the reporting party to the missing person.
 - b. Time and place of last known location and the identity of anyone accompanying the subject.
 - c. The extent of any search for the subject.
 - d. Whether the subject has been missing on prior occasions and the degree to which the absence departs from established behavior patterns, habits or plans.
 - e. Whether the individual has been involved recently in domestic incidents; suffered emotional trauma or life crises; demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior; is dependent on drugs or alcohol or has a history of mental illness.
 - f. The current physical condition of the subject and whether the person is currently on prescription medication.
2. If the missing person is a child, inquiry should also determine if the child
 - a. is or may be with any adult who could cause him/her harm;
 - b. may have been the subject of a parental abduction;
 - c. has previously run away from home, has threatened to do so or has a history of explainable or unexplainable absences for extended periods of time.
3. A supervisory officer shall be notified immediately upon classification of a report as "missing-critical."

C. Preliminary Investigation

The preliminary investigation is intended to gather additional information and to take those steps that will aid in the search for and location of a missing person. This includes gathering the following types of information and materials:

1. Complete description of the subject and a recent photograph.
2. Details of any physical or emotional problems identified in items B-1-e and f of this policy.
3. Identity of the last person(s) to have seen the subject as well as friends, relatives, coworkers or associates who were or may have been in contact with the subject prior to disappearance.

4. Plans, habits, routines and personal interests of the subject including places frequented or locations of particular personal significance.
5. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables.
6. Any suggestions of foul play or accident.
7. In the case of missing children, officers shall be particularly cognizant of information that may suggest the potential for parental abduction or the possibility of stranger abduction, as well as
 - a. the presence of behavioral problems;
 - b. past instances of running away;
 - c. signs of an abusive home environment or dysfunctional family situation;
 - d. whether the child is believed to be with adults who may pose a danger; and
 - e. the name and location of the school attended by the child and any persons who may be responsible for private transportation to and from the location.
8. When possible, officers should gain permission to search a missing child's home and school locker, as appropriate.
9. Upon verification of a missing person, a missing person report shall be completed and appropriate entries made in state and national information databases in accordance with established procedures (e.g.: NCIC and The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children).
10. In the case of persons designated as "missing-critical," a supervisory officer may direct that
 - a. the dispatcher broadcast to all persons on duty all information necessary to identify the missing person, and
 - b. request that the shift commander authorize mobilization of resources necessary for an area search.

D. Ongoing Investigation

Ongoing investigations of missing persons should include but should not be limited to the following actions and activities:

1. Request release of dental records and any fingerprints available.
2. Contact hospitals and the coroner's office as appropriate for injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person.
3. Thoroughly check the location at which the missing person was last seen and conduct interviews as appropriate with persons who were with the individual or who may work in or frequent the area.

4. Conduct interviews with any additional family, friends, work associates, schoolmates and teachers as well as school counselors and social case workers, as appropriate, to explore the potential for foul play, voluntary flight, or, in the case of juveniles, parental kidnapping or running away.
 5. Provide identification and related information to all elements of this agency, the state police missing persons' authority, neighboring police agencies and, if parental or stranger-to-stranger abduction is suspected, the FBI.
 6. Decisions to use local media to help locate missing persons shall be made with the approval of the police chief executive and the missing person's family.
 7. The lead investigator shall maintain routine on-going contact with the missing person's closest relative concerning progress of the investigation. These and other relevant individuals shall be informed that they must notify the lead investigator as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.
- E. Recovery of Missing Persons and Case Closure
1. Competent adults, having left home for personal reasons, cannot be forced to return home. Officers locating such individuals shall
 - a. advise them that they are the subject of a missing person investigation;
 - b. ask if they desire the reporting party or next-of-kin to be notified of their whereabouts; and
 - c. make provisions to transmit this information to the reporting party or next-of-kin if permitted by the missing person.
 2. In all cases, reporting parties shall be informed of the well-being of located missing persons. Unless criminal matters necessitate other action, desires of missing persons not to reveal their whereabouts shall be honored.
 3. Missing persons shall be questioned to establish the circumstances surrounding their disappearance and whether criminal activity was involved.
 4. In cases involving juveniles, officers shall ensure that
 - a. the juvenile receives medical attention if necessary in a timely manner;
 - b. initial questioning of the youth identifies the circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance, any individuals who may be criminally responsible and/ or whether an abusive or negligent home environment was a contributory factor, and
 - c. that parents, guardians and/or the person reporting the missing youth are notified in a timely manner.
 5. Upon location of a missing person, all agencies and information systems previously contacted for assistance will be notified or updated.
 6. Where indicated, follow-up action shall include filing of an abuse and neglect report with the state youth service agency.
 7. The case report shall include a complete report on the whereabouts, actions and activities of children while missing.
 8. Where indicated, criminal charges shall be filed with the prosecutor's office.

Every effort has been made by the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no "model" policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. Each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of federal court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities among other factors.

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