

GENERAL POLICE ORDER

No. G.P.O. 17-006

Date: 04-25-17

SUBJECT: Missing Persons Investigations

I. 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 dispatcher 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 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 that particular care be exercised in instances involving missing children and those who may be mentally or physically impaired or others who are insufficiently prepared to take care of themselves.

II. PURPOSE:

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

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 in conformance with the criteria of this policy.
2. A person may be declared “**missing**” when his whereabouts are unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded by knowledgeable parties as highly unusual or suspicious.
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;
 - 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 taken 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, date of birth, age, social security number, address, and physical description of the subject and relationship of the reporting party to the missing person.
 - b. Time and location of last known contact 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 pattern, habits or plans.
 - e. Whether the individual has been involved recently in:
 - 1. domestic incidents;
 - 2. suffered emotional trauma of life crises;
 - 3. demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior; or
 - 4. 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 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 period of time; and
 - d. the category under which the child is reporting missing.
3. The OIC will make the determination on the proper classification of a report and proper response.
4. The Chief shall be notified at a reasonable time upon classification of a report as “missing critical”.

C. Preliminary Investigation

The preliminary investigation shall also be used 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 recent photograph.
2. Identify details of any physical or emotional problems.
3. Identity of the last person to have seen the subject.
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. 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).

- a. If the missing person is a juvenile, or at least eighteen but less than twenty-one years of age, a report must be taken and the information entered into NCIC immediately.
- b. The following conditions are mandated by law regarding missing persons who are 21 years of age or older:
 1. If foul play is suspected the information contained in the report should be entered into NCIC as soon as possible but must be entered into NCIC within (7) days.
 2. If no foul play and the subject has not returned, the information contained in the report must be entered into NCIC within (30) days.
 3. If no foul play was indicated initially but evidence of such becomes known before the end of the seven day period, the information contained in the report must be entered into NCIC before the end of that seven (7) day period.
 4. If no foul play was indicated initially but evidence of such becomes known after the seven day period, the information contained in the report must be entered into NCIC within (48) hours.
9. If the person is mentally impaired or 65 years of age or older, a Missing Adult Alert may be warranted based on the following criteria. **Note: All the below listed criteria must be met for the request to qualify as an alert.**
 - a. individual is in fact missing and investigative steps taken to locate the person were unsuccessful.
 - b. individual is 65 years of age or older or mentally impaired
 - c. their disappearance poses a credible threat of immediate danger or serious bodily harm or death to the individual.
 - d. there is sufficient descriptive information about the missing individual and the circumstances surrounding their disappearance to indicate that an alert activation would help in locating the individual
10. The Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office ***Photo Release Form*** shall be completed and signed by the reporting person as soon as possible. Verbal authorization for the photo release may be obtained in life threatening cases, followed up with written authorization as soon as practicable. The missing person's photograph (up to 3 images) will then be directed to the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office ***Missing Persons Unit*** (MPU). The fax, mail, and email information for the MPU is listed on the photo release form.

D. Follow-up Investigation

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

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Provide identification and related information to all elements of this agency, neighboring police agencies and, if parental or stranger-to-stranger abduction is suspected, the FBI.
4. Contact hospitals and the coroner's office as appropriate for injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person.
5. Request release of dental records and any fingerprints available.
6. Decisions to use local media to help locate missing persons shall be made with the approval of the Chief of Police 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 local investigator as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.

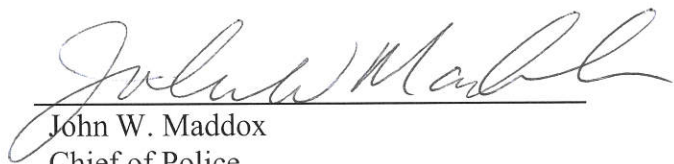
E. Additional Follow-up Responsibilities for Missing Juveniles.

1. No later than 30 days after the original entry into LEADS and NCIC computer networks, the assigned detective shall review the original entry for verification and provide any additional information (i.e., medical and dental records) to use in updating the entry.
2. The assigned detective shall institute or assist with appropriate search and investigation procedures.
3. The assigned detective shall maintain close liaison with the National Center for Missing and Exploited children for the exchange of information and technical assistance in the missing children cases.

F. 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 wellbeing of located missing persons unless criminal matters necessitate other action. The desire 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.
 - a. A copy of any locate, clearance, or cancel received or sent on LEADS shall be forwarded to the Detective Bureau by Dispatch personnel sending or receiving such information.
 - b. The Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office Missing Persons Liaison (MPL) shall be notified within 3 hours of the return or locating of the missing person. If after normal business hours, the MPL shall be notified by 10 am the next day.
 6. Where indicated, proper follow-up action shall be taken for abuse and neglect cases.
 7. The follow-up report shall include a complete narrative on the whereabouts, actions and activities of children while missing.
 8. Where indicated, criminal charges may be filed with the prosecutor's office.


John W. Maddox
Chief of Police