

**New Canaan Police Department**

Subject: **MISSING PERSONS**

**General Order Number: 97-5-107**

**File: OPS 2**

Law Enforcement

**I. PURPOSE/POLICY**

The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines and responsibilities regarding this Department's response to reports of missing person complaints, including adults and children.

It is the policy of this department to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing adults and children, including those who are unidentified as it is reported and without delay. All such investigations shall be acted up in a swift, organized and efficient manner.

**II. RESPONSIBILITY**

It is the responsibility of all Department personnel to adhere to the procedures set forth in this general order. It is the additional responsibility of the supervisory staff to insure its compliance.

**III. DEFINITIONS**

**A.** The term **missing person** shall include both adults and children who are considered to be a runaway, abducted or abandoned. It refers to any person who is reported missing to a law enforcement agency until the person is located or determined to be a voluntarily missing adult.

**B.** The term **missing adult** refers to a person who is:

1. 18 years of age or older and whose absence is contrary to his or her normal patterns of behavior and may be due to one or more of the unusual circumstances listed below in Paragraph D.

**C.** The term **missing child** refers to a person who is:

1. Under 18 years of age and whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent, guardian, or responsible party. It also includes any child who is missing voluntarily or involuntarily or under circumstances not conforming to his or her ordinary habits or behavior and who may be in need of assistance.
2. A temporary or permanent resident of Connecticut or who is believed to be in Connecticut, whose location has not been determined and who has been reported as missing to a law enforcement agency.

**D.** A missing adult or child will be considered "**at-risk**" when ;

1. Regardless of age, the missing person is missing under circumstances in which he or she is in danger of serious physical injury or death. *This policy presumes that every missing person or missing adult person will be considered at "high risk" until a reasonable and articulable basis to conclude otherwise exists.*

- E.** A missing “**not at-risk adult**” means an adult will not be considered “**at-risk**” if any of the following criteria are met;
1. The adult is an “**absent spouse**”. The spouse has not committed a crime and is legally free to come and go. (*Caution should be exercised both in preserving the privacy rights of the spouse in their wish to keep there whereabouts unknown and in making sure that the “absent spouse” is not, in fact, the victim of foul play.*)
  2. An adult has left a note and/or told a credible person that they are intentionally absent (excluding a suicide note).
  3. An adult who simply has not been in touch with the reporting party for an extended period of time, unless extenuating circumstances exist.
  4. Fugitives from justice, including AWOL service personnel.
  5. An adult who is being sought for business or social purposes such as debt collections or school reunions.
- F.** The term **unusual circumstances** refers to a missing adult or child who is:
1. 13 years of age or younger **-or-**
  2. Is believed to be one or more of the following:
    - a. Out of the zone of safety for his or her age, development stage, and/or physical condition. This zone will vary depending on the child’s age, developmental stage (i.e. an infant’s zone of safety would be in the immediate presence of an adult custodian or the crib, stroller, or carriage where the infant was placed, while the zone of safety for a school-aged might be the child’s immediate neighborhood or route to/from school.
    - b. Mentally diminished to a point where the child may have difficulty communicating with others about needs, identity, or address.
    - c. Drug dependency for either prescription or illegal drugs. Examples range from dependencies on diabetic or seizure medication to addiction to illicit substances.
    - d. A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation.
    - e. In a life-threatening situation.
    - f. Absent from home for an extended period of time before being reported as missing.
    - g. Believed to be with others who could endanger his or her welfare.
    - h. Is absent under circumstances inconsistent with established patterns of behavior for that person. **-or-**
    - i. Whose disappearance involves circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the missing person should be considered at-risk.

#### **IV. PROCEDURES**

##### **A. Dispatchers**

1. Upon receipt of a report of a missing person, the dispatcher shall:
  - a. Determine if circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing child or adult. The dispatcher will question the caller to make a preliminary assessment regarding the level of risk to the missing person.
  - b. Promptly dispatch an officer(s) to the scene of the report.
  - c. Notify the Shift Supervisor of the incident.
  - d. Search Department records and databases (i.e. LEAS, Shift Information Book) for related information. Pertinent information may include:
    - 1) Court Orders or other custody arrangements with the mother / father of the child.
    - 2) Prior incidents that could be pertinent such as suspicious persons, attempted abductions, or any domestic disputes.
  - e. When sufficient information has been received, promptly notify on-duty police personnel and other appropriate law enforcement agencies of the missing person if the person is under 18 years of age or if there is evidence that the missing person is at-risk.
  - f. Ensure that information regarding a missing person under 16 years of age who is at-risk is entered into the COLLECT system within 4 hour of taking the report.
  - g. Ensure that all missing persons under the age of 21 are entered into the NCIC system promptly.

##### **B. Responding Officers**

1. The primary officer dispatched to the report of a missing person shall:
  - a. Respond promptly to the scene of the report according to code response assigned by the dispatcher.
  - b. When conducting interviews, officers must be cognizant of the feelings of helplessness and anxiety felt by the reporting party and families of the missing person. Special attention should be given to reports of missing children or for persons with physical or mental limitations.
  - c. Interview the reporting parties, witnesses etc. and gather information regarding the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. In the case of a missing child, contact should be made with the parents as soon as possible, regardless of who made the initial complaint.

- d. Obtain the name and a complete description of the missing person including photographs (depicting smile if possible) and/or videotapes if available. Note the relationship of the reporting party to the missing person. Information gathered should be promptly relayed to dispatch so that it may be disseminated to other officers and agencies.
- e. Conduct a thorough search of the scene, even if the disappearance supposedly took place elsewhere. Verify that the person is, in fact, missing. In the case of missing children, a thorough search of the house and property should be conducted, even if the parents/guardians have already done so. In the case of younger children, special attention should be paid to small enclosures that could be used as hiding spaces. In the case of older children, the officer should ask if the parents have checked with the child's friends or if they have overlooked something the child may have said that would explain the absence.
  - 1) During this search, check for notes, travel folders, newspaper articles and the like.
- f. Determine when, where, and by whom the missing person was last seen, possible destinations and locations frequented. Interview individuals who last had contact with the missing person. Identify and interview everyone present at the scene. Obtain a list of friends, co-workers, acquaintances, associates etc as well as possible destinations.
- g. In the case of missing children, determine the child's custody status and ascertain whether a dispute over custody might have played a role in the disappearance. Review any existing Court Orders (Protective, Restraining, Custody, etc.) if applicable. Determine if the missing person has been reported missing previously and the degree to which the absence departs from established behavioral patterns.
- h. Determine if any unusual circumstances exist, as defined in Section III, which might warrant the deployment of additional resources. Determine whether the missing person has been involved in any recent domestic problems, suffered emotional trauma or life crisis; demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior; has talked of running away or committing suicide; is dependent on drugs or alcohol; or has a history of mental illness.
- i. Identify the missing person's zone of safety for his/her age, developmental stage, and physical/mental state and if he/she is currently on prescription medication. This includes determining how far the person could travel from the location where he/she was last seen before he/she would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation.
- j. When applicable, obtain a description of the suspected abductor(s) and other pertinent information such as a description of any vehicle(s) or other transportation involved, direction of travel etc.
- k. Determine whether the missing person has taken anything with them (e.g. food, money, clothing, weapons, and personal items) or if they have bank accounts, charge/debit cards or toll passes or other traceable items in their possession.
- l. Determine if the missing person has a cell phone and/or pager. Record the number and identify the carrier. Call the number and if unanswered, leave a message.

- m. Complete a NCIC Missing Person File Data Collection Entry Guide – *NCIC Initial Entry Report* (REV 2/06), promptly enter the information (or relay the information to be entered by dispatch) into one of the following categories:
  - 1) Disability
  - 2) Endangered
  - 3) Involuntary
  - 4) Juvenile
  - 5) Catastrophe
  - 6) Other
- n. Conduct and/or lay the groundwork for a neighborhood or area canvas.
- o. Determine if the person has access to a cell phone, pager, or any other communication device. Any records from such a device could determine whom the person last spoke with. In the case of missing children, the officer should determine if the child has access to online services (i.e. chat, e-mail). Such records could reveal if the child arranged to meet another individual online.
- p. If unusual circumstances exist, secure the area as a potential crime scene. In addition, the missing person's home should be secured until evidence can be collected
- q. Family members may wish to provide fingerprint cards, DNA samples or additional documents. Officers should take possession of the items and document and/or store said property appropriately.
- r. Immediately update the supervisor and dispatcher. Complete the necessary reports and forward copies to the investigator following up on the case. Officers and/or Investigators are required to promptly send copies of their report(s) to;
  - 1) The law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the missing person's address, where last seen or intended destination as applicable.
- s. When located, the officer should and/or investigator assigned to the case shall interview the missing person in order to verify the circumstances of the report and their current status. If it's not possible to conduct said interview in person, it may be conducted via telephone, but only after that person's identity has been confirmed.
  - 1) The reporting party and assisting agencies shall be notified as soon as practicable.
  - 2) Any automated/NCIC/COLLECT system entries must be canceled.
- t. The closure of missing person's investigation is only appropriate when the missing person is confirmed returned/located or evidence has matched an unidentified person or body.

- 1) Inability to move forward on an investigation is not a valid reason to close a case.
- 2) When the reported missing person is under the age of 18, the missing person should remain classified under their actual age as when originally reported missing, regardless of their current age.

**C. Supervisors**

1. Supervisor responding to the scene of a missing person shall:
  - a. Obtain a briefing from the primary officer and other officers at the scene.
  - b. Determine if additional officers, resources, or outside agencies are needed to assist in the investigation. This includes contacting the department's AMBER/SILVER Alert/LOCATER coordinator, if available.
    - 1) Additional resources that may assist in a search include;
      - a) Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
      - b) New Canaan Fire Department
      - c) New Canaan Highway Department
      - d) Local Law Enforcement/State Police Area K-9 Units
      - e) Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
      - f) Department of Justice (DOJ)
      - g) Critical Reach, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
      - h) National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA)
      - i) Alzheimer's Association "Safe Return" Program
  - c. When appropriate, contact other law enforcement agencies and request assistance in locating the missing person within their jurisdiction.
  - d. Determine if there is any area or property to be protected as a crime scene.
  - e. Determine if activation of the **AMBER Alert** system is appropriate and designate an officer to send the Alert, according to Connecticut State Police criteria:
    - 1) The child must be under 18 years of age, unless there are special circumstances such as mental or physical disability.
    - 2) The child must be in imminent danger of serious bodily harm or death.
    - 3) There must be enough descriptive information to believe a broadcast will help. At a minimum the broadcast should include:

- a) Description of child
  - b) Description of suspect; or
  - c) Description of vehicle
  - 4) The information must be received in a timely manner.
- f. Determine if activation of the **SILVER Alert** system is appropriate and designate an officer to send the Alert. Note; the SILVER Alert system mandates that law enforcement agencies **immediately** begin searching for missing individuals. SILVER Alerts must meet the following criteria:
- 1) Applies to any missing person age 18 or older who has a mental impairment or;
  - 2) Who is 65 years of age or older.
- g. Upon transmission of the request form to the DPS Communications Center, the Shift Supervisor, in the absence of the Public Information Officer, shall have the responsibility of having a press release containing a summary of the active investigation and any other pertinent information faxed to Metro News and Associated Press at the following numbers:
- 1) Associated Press
    - a) Hartford fax: 860-727-4003
    - b) Boston fax: 617-338-8125
  - 2) Metro News
    - a) Hartford fax: 860-616-1988
    - b) Phoenix fax: 480-348-3059
- h. If appropriate, utilize the **LOCATER** application to distribute posters to all shift personnel as well as any other agencies involved with the search. Poster alerts should also be e-mailed to any town, city, state, or other geographical area, where it would be reasonable to assume the missing child could be located.
- i. If appropriate, designate an officer to activate an ACIM (A Child is Missing) alert.
- j. Consider the need to establish a command post in the area of the incident. If such a need exists, the command post should be close enough to the center of activity to facilitate control and coordination, but sufficiently apart to allow a free exchange of ideas among responders.
- k. Determine if the area should be safeguarded as a potential crime scene. If so, secure the area until an Investigator arrives.
- l. Organize and coordinate search efforts. Determine the size of the search area and if additional officers or outside resources (i.e. K-9, CERT, CT State Police) should be contacted.

- m. Ensure that all required notifications have been made.
- n. Establish a liaison with the victim's family. Counseling services should be considered.
- o. Manage media relations until the Public Information Officer is available.
- p. In the case of a missing child, the Supervisor or his/her designee shall submit a report to the Missing Children Information Clearinghouse, per C.G.S. 29-1e.
- q. If the missing person is not recovered by the end of shift, a notation shall be made in the Shift Information Log with teletype and photograph, if available, to notify oncoming shifts of the missing person.

**D. Investigators**

- 1. Investigators assigned to a missing person case shall:
  - a. Obtain a briefing from officers and/or the supervisor at the scene.
  - b. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information.
  - c. When practicable, check his/her computer's social networking sites
  - d. Access the Sex Offender Registration list to determine if any registrants reside in the area.
  - e. Obtain a brief history of recent family dynamics. Access records of family contact with law enforcement agencies, social service departments, schools, and other family-service organizations.
  - f. Explore the basis for any conflicting information from witnesses or others involved.
  - g. Evaluate the need for additional resources and specialized services to aid in the investigation such the FBI, CT State Police, and services offered by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
  - h. If it appears that the case will not be promptly resolved, then descriptive information should be updated to include dental records, medical information, fingerprints, and DNA sample, if available. This information should be entered in a NCIC Missing Person File Data Collection Entry Guide.
  - i. Review all media communications to ensure that the integrity of the investigation is not compromised.
  - j. Follow up with assisting law enforcement agencies and the victim's family regularly and at a minimum, on a weekly basis, to determine if any new information has developed and to continually communicate relevant and appropriate information.
  - k. In the event that the missing child is under 17 years of age, the Youth Officer will also be contacted for follow-up on the case.



1. If the missing person has not been located within 30 days, the investigator must enter the person into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System "NamUs".

**E. Information Received from Other Law Enforcement Agencies**

1. Upon receipt of information from another law enforcement agency regarding a missing person, the desk officer shall promptly notify the shift supervisor. The shift supervisor or designee shall promptly give appropriate assistance to said agency.

**F. Missing Child Recovery**

1. The officer who locates a missing child shall:
  - a. Verify that the located child is, in fact, the reported missing child.
  - b. Determine if there is a need for any intervention services such as mental or physical health examinations or arrangements for family counseling.
  - c. Arrange for the missing child to be returned to his/her parent or legal guardian or to the appropriate agency.
  - d. In the event that the recovered child is 16 or 17 years of age, the child may not be required to return home, provided that:
    - 1) The physical/mental health of the child is established and found to be in satisfactory condition.
    - 2) The child is not a "family with service needs" (FWSN), or "youth in crisis" as defined under C.G.S. 46b-120.
    - 3) Leaving the child to his/her own accord will not place said child in any physical or emotional harm.
  - e. Cancel all outstanding alerts (NCIC, AMBER Alert, ACIM, LOCATER alerts, etc.)
  - f. If the Missing Children Information Clearinghouse had been notified, then follow-up notification shall be given regarding the recovery of the missing child.

**G. Unidentified Persons**

1. The officer who is assigned to the report of an unidentified person, whether living or deceased, shall:
  - a. Obtain a complete description of the person.
  - b. Enter the person's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
  - c. Utilize available resources to identify the person, such as:
    - 1) Services offered by National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
    - 2) LOCATER

- 3) ACIM (A Child is Missing)
  - 4) Missing Children Information Clearinghouse
  - 5) State Medical Examiner's Office
- d. Once identification has been made, cancel all notifications, and contact the appropriate agency.

**V. DISTRIBUTION**

This general order will be reproduced in electronic and traditional media. All sworn personnel shall have access to Department general orders through a read-only file on their individual domain of the Department's computer network. Printed copies will also be placed in locations throughout headquarters so that they are easily accessible to all personnel.

**VI. EFFECTIVE DATE**

This general order approved by the Police Commission on June 25, 1997 and is effective July 1, 1997.

Reviewed May 2000  
Revised March 2006  
Reviewed July 2009  
Revised June 2011  
Revised December 2011

Per Order,

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Edward J. Nadriczny  
Chief of Police