



## VSP-DIR-509

### Missing Persons

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#### 1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 Missing persons cases are unique and serious matters that need to be professionally handled to ensure the best possible outcome. Communication between troopers, station commanders, and BCI is critical in every missing persons case as is communication between the state police, other agencies and the media.

1.2 A missing juvenile or endangered person is a high priority case as these persons are especially vulnerable and can easily become victims of crime. As such, all reports of a missing juvenile or endangered person will be investigated without delay.

1.3 To identify the distinguishable differences between types and criteria of missing persons.

1.4 To set forth guidelines for the investigation into missing persons and to identify necessary reporting procedures.

#### 2.0 DEFINITIONS

2.1 Missing Person – A person whose whereabouts are unknown and who has been reported missing by a credible person.

2.2 Missing Juvenile – A person under 21 years of age whose whereabouts are unknown and who has been reported missing by a credible person.

2.3 Missing Person in Need of Search and Rescue – Persons who are missing or lost in the back country, remote areas or waters of the state. (refer to VSP-DIR-532 for this specific policy)

2.4 Missing Endangered Person – A person whose whereabouts are unknown and reason exists the person may be in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, environment or weather conditions, in the company of a potentially dangerous person, or some other factor putting the person in peril.

#### 3.0 POLICY

3.1 Vermont State Police will respond to all reports of missing persons in areas covered by the Vermont State Police.

3.2 Supervisors will be notified of all missing person reports. If a supervisor is not working at the time of the report, the senior trooper in charge will notify and consult with a supervisor on duty in the Troop area.

3.3 Assistance from other agencies during a missing person case shall be at the direction of the supervisor in charge of the investigation.

3.4 Prior to dissemination, any press release or statement issued or media involvement during the investigation will be first approved by the commanding officer in charge of the

investigation. When possible the PIO may be consulted on press releases before they are disseminated.

3.5 Applicable missing persons will be entered into National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as missing persons under the appropriate category.

3.6 Local, state and federal law enforcement agencies will also be notified of the missing person by appropriate means such as BOL (be on the lookout for) via police radio, mobile data terminal or other reasonable method.

#### 4.0 PROCEDURE

4.1 Members responding to reports of any missing person shall immediately notify the shift supervisor of the incident and continue to update accordingly as details are learned through investigation. If the missing person is not located by the end of the shift, the watch commander will be notified and will in turn notify the BCI Lieutenant for appropriate follow-up.

4.2 Members will use the Lost Person Questionnaire to obtain the required information for any reported missing person.

4.3 Members will obtain a recent photograph of the missing person.

4.4 Members will enter the missing person into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as soon as the relevant conditions exist. The Vermont Intelligence Center receives and monitors all NCIC entered missing persons. The following six categories of missing persons and applicable conditions have been identified by NCIC for entry under the missing person category:

- (1) Disability – a person of any age who is missing and under proven physical/mental disability or is senile, thereby subjecting him/herself or others to personal and immediate danger.
- (2) Endangered – a person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that his/her physical safety may be in danger.
- (3) Involuntary – a person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that the disappearance may not have been voluntary, i.e., abduction or kidnapping.
- (4) Juvenile – a person who is missing and NOT declared emancipated as defined by the laws of his/her state of residence and does not meet any of the entry criteria set forth in 1, 2, 3, or 5.
- (5) Catastrophe Victim – a person of any age who is missing after a catastrophe.
- (6) Other – a person not meeting the criteria for entry in any other category who is missing and;

- 1) for whom there is a reasonable concern for his/her safety or,

- 2) a person who is under age 21 **and** declared emancipated by the laws of his/her state of residence. In accordance with Title 42, United States code (U.S.C.), Section 5779(a), agencies are required to enter records into NCIC Missing Person File for missing individuals **under the age of 21.**

4.5 The investigation of a missing person shall also include the following steps, although this is not an exhaustive list:

- (1) Notify the Vermont Intelligence Center (VIC) for additional investigative resources.
- (2) Prepare and send out a press release asking for the public's assistance in looking for the person. Attach a current photograph of the person, if available.

- (3) Obtain physical evidence to assist in identifying the person. This will include their tooth brush, hair brush and other items that would have biological data on it. Also obtain the person's dental records from the family or dentist.
- (4) Interview family, friends and witnesses who last saw the person to determine the person's state of mind and their last location seen.
- (5) Canvas the neighborhood for any witnesses or information about the missing person.
- (6) Obtain video surveillance footage from area businesses for signs of the person.
- (7) Look at known social media sites for postings of or about the person.
- (8) Enter any relevant vehicles into the LPR database.
- (9) Notify the Canadian border crossing of the missing person.
- (10) Utilize K-9 to track the person if applicable.
- (11) Consider the use of air assets in the search, as well as the use of VSP's Search and Rescue Team.
- (12) Contact the persons financial institutions and credit card companies to determine if there is any activity on the accounts.
- (13) Obtain phone records and, when possible, GPS location of any cell phones or wireless devices.

4.6 Throughout the investigation the case officer should keep in contact with the reporting person and/or family members of the missing person. When the person is located the reporting person will be notified that the person has been located.

4.7 If the missing person has not been located within seven days, BCI will obtain the relevant information and submit it to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) online, <http://namus.gov>.

## 5.0 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

### 5.1 Missing Juveniles

- (1) NCIC requires any juveniles whose whereabouts are unaccounted for, regardless of the reason behind their absence, be entered into NCIC as missing. On April 7, 2003 "Suzanne's Law" changed the age of mandatory missing person record entry from under 18 to under 21 years of age. [ref. 42 USC 5779(c)] NCIC entry shall be made as soon as possible after the member obtains the minimum amount of information required for entry.
- (2) Unless otherwise determined through investigation, runaway juveniles shall be entered into NCIC and investigated as missing persons. Runaway juveniles whose location are known, but are voluntarily refusing to return to their residence are not considered missing persons.
- (3) Members will determine if the juvenile is in state custody and, if so, contact the Department of Children and Family Services for notification.
- (4) Members will obtain a recent photograph of the juvenile.
- (5) If the missing juvenile meets any of the above NCIC criteria in addition to being juveniles (disability, endangered, involuntary, etc.), they shall be entered into NCIC as the special circumstance, not as a juvenile (e.g. a kidnapped child will be entered into NCIC as Involuntary).

### 5.2 Missing Endangered Juveniles

(1) Any missing endangered juvenile investigations shall be brought immediately to the BCI Lieutenant. the BCI Lieutenant will then consult with the Director of the Vermont Intelligence Center (VIC) to determine if an Amber Alert will be initiated, The Amber Alert criteria is as follows:

(a.) The abducted child is 17 years of age or under, and

- i. A law enforcement agency believes that the abducted child is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm or death, either at the hands of another or due to a proven mental or physical disability, and
- ii. There is enough descriptive information for law enforcement to believe an Amber Alert will help locate the child, and
- iii. The initiating law enforcement agency is willing and able to provide resources to assist in the investigation.

(2) The VIC will be immediately notified of any missing endangered juveniles, whether or not an Amber Alert is activated. The VIC will provide the appropriate support.

(3) The BCI Lieutenant, Station Commander, Watch Commander or State Duty Officer will notify the Public Information Officer to establish procedures for media coverage during the incident.

(4) Flyers with photos and details will be distributed throughout the area for the public's assistance in helping locate the juvenile.

(5) If the juvenile is under the age of 18, members will contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). NCMEC can also make arrangements to provide additional investigative support from other resources including Team Adam and Project Alert.

### 5.3 Missing Endangered Persons

(1) Missing persons where there is reason to believe the person's safety is at risk shall be treated as a priority. Members will respond to initiate the investigation and determine the nature of the endangerment (e.g. health, involuntary, suspicious circumstances) and immediately notify a supervisor. The supervisor shall notify the Station Commander/Watch Commander who will confer with the BCI Lieutenant to determine BCI's involvement in the investigation.

(2) Any missing endangered person shall be immediately entered into NCIC under the applicable category. Members should attempt to obtain a recent photograph of the individual as soon as possible.

(3) Members shall consult with the Vermont Information Center (VIC) on all missing endangered persons to determine what assistance the VIC can provide in the investigation.

(4) If reason exists that the public can aid in locating the missing endangered person or that there is a threat to the public, media involvement will be at the discretion of the station commander/watch commander, who will consult with the Public Information Officer (PIO) to determine media involvement. The PIO will be responsible for all media relations during the investigation.

## 6.0 LOCATING A MISSING PERSON

6.1 In all instances in which a person has been entered into NCIC or other criminal justice data base and is then located, s/he shall be removed from NCIC or criminal justice data base.

6.2 Members will notify the VIC when the missing person has been located in all instances in which the VIC has provided members with case support.

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