

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT
POLICY AND PROCEDURE

No. 100

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Dated: September 23, 2003

MISSING PERSONS

- I. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons.
- II. **POLICY:** It shall be the policy of the Upper Merion Township Police Department that all reports of missing persons are given full consideration and attention by its members, and that the department shall comply with the provisions of Section 2908 of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code in regard to the duties of law enforcement agencies with respect to missing children.
- III. **DEFINITIONS:**
- CHILD: As used in this policy the term "child" means a person less than 18 years of age.
- IV. **PROCEDURE:**
- A. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:
1. Missing person reports shall be investigated immediately upon receipt regardless of the age of the person or the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. In no case shall a waiting period be imposed prior to beginning an investigation of a missing person.
 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 person's behavior patterns, plans or routines.

B. INITIAL INVESTIGATION:

1. Any time a call is received indicating that a person is or may be missing; an officer shall be assigned to immediately investigate. The shift supervisor shall also be notified of the call.
2. As part of the investigation, all information relevant to the missing person and the circumstances surrounding the disappearance shall be recorded on an Incident Report.
3. The officer taking the initial report must gather as much pertinent information as possible in order to properly classify the missing person and initiate the proper response. This includes, but is not limited to the following information:
 - a. Name, age, and physical description of the person and relationship of the reporting person to the missing person. Attempt to obtain a recent photograph.
 - b. Time and place of last known location and the identity of the last person(s) to have seen or had contact with the person. Also, the identity of anyone accompanying the person and whether that person would cause him/her harm.
 - c. The description of any suspects and/or vehicles that may be involved.
 - d. The extent of any previous search for the person.
 - e. If a child, 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.
 - f. Plans, habits routines and personal interests of the person including places frequented or locations of particular personal significance.
 - g. Whether the person has been missing on previous occasions and the degree to which the current absence departs from established behavior patterns, habits or plans.
 - h. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables.
 - i. Whether the person has recently been involved in domestic incidents; suffered emotional trauma or life crises; demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior; is dependent on drugs or alcohol.
 - j. Whether the person has a history of mental illness, or has demonstrated suicidal tendency, or has access to weapons if there are weapons missing.
 - k. The current physical condition of the person and whether the person is currently on prescription medication.
 - l. If a child, verify the custody status.

- m. Any suggestions of foul play or accident.
4. If upon initial investigation it appears that the person is lost or the victim of a criminal act, the investigating officer shall immediately notify the shift supervisor.
 - a. Upon being acquainted with the facts of the case, the supervisor shall determine if a detective is to be immediately notified or if any other special efforts to locate the person are to be initiated.
 5. As soon as a missing child is sufficiently identified, he/she shall be entered into NCIC, and the Missing Persons File through the Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN) in accordance with Pennsylvania State Police and Upper Merion Township Police Department policy and procedures.
 - a. The reporting officer shall complete the CLEAN/NCIC Missing Person Entry Worksheet. The information contained in this worksheet shall then be submitted to the Communications Center for entry. The information on this worksheet can be communicated to the Communications Center through electronic means or verbally if time dictates. But in any event, the worksheet must be placed in the case file following the CLEAN/NCIC Missing Persons Entry.
 - b. An officer shall be assigned to immediately investigate the report of a missing person who is over the age of 18 and under 21. A missing person who is over the age of 18 and under 21 must also be entered into NCIC, and the Missing Person's File in CLEAN (refer to "Suzanne's Law, Federal P.L. 108.21 Section 204).
 - c. Missing persons under the age of 21 must be entered into NCIC within 2 hours. The time clock for the 2 hours begins when the investigating officer has obtained the minimum mandatory data for entry of an NCIC record. The time when the minimum mandatory data is received must be noted on the investigating officer's report to ensure compliance with this requirement.
 - d. A record for a missing person 21 and over may be entered providing the officer has signed documentation in his/her possession supporting the stated conditions under which the person is declared missing. A Missing Person Declaration Form will be completed and delivered to the Communications Center before the entry is made.
 6. Should the department take custody of an unidentified living child, a physically or mentally disabled child, or an unidentified deceased child, the department shall make an immediate entry into the Unidentified Persons File through CLEAN in accordance with Pennsylvania State Police policy and procedures.
 7. Should the department observe or receive descriptive information on an unidentified deceased child; the department shall make an immediate entry into the Unidentified Deceased Person file through CLEAN in accordance with Pennsylvania State Police policy and procedures.

8. After the missing person is entered into CLEAN/NCIC, a message may be sent to all regional law enforcement agencies indicating that this department is investigating the report of a missing person. The message should contain all the pertinent information necessary to assist them in locating the missing person. The shift supervisor is responsible to notify the Communications Center of any agency/agencies who should be contacted directly about a radio broadcast related to the missing person. Consideration should be given to the fact that several bordering police agencies are not dispatched through the Montgomery County radio system.
9. If a missing person returns home or is located, the recovering officer shall insure a timely cancellation of any CLEAN/NCIC entries and regional messages. The recovering officer shall also insure that the assigned detective is notified.

C. AMBER ALERT ACTIVATION:

1. Amber Alert is a response plan developed by the Pennsylvania State Police for child abductions. The Plan can be activated to alert the public of an abduction anywhere in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through the Emergency Broadcast System (EAS). The Plan can also notify other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies within surrounding states. Following approval from a command or supervisory officer, The PSP Watch Center shall immediately be called (877-777-9975) when an Amber Alert is being considered. It shall be the responsibility of the incident commander or the shift supervisor to make sure that the PSP Watch Center has been contacted. The PSP Watch Center has access to resources that may be helpful regardless of whether or not an Amber Alert request meets the criteria and gets approved by the PA State Police for transmission.
2. The following criteria must be met before the Amber Alert Plan can be activated:
 - a. The abducted child must be under the age of 18; and,
 - b. The police must believe the abducted child is in imminent danger of death or serious bodily injury.
 - c. Additional factors are considered in the decision making process as to whether or not to activate the PA Amber Alert Plan. These factors include, but are not limited to: availability of descriptive information which could help in the recovery of the child, time elapsed since the child was last seen, and the reliability of witness(es).
 - d. The Amber Alert Plan is limited to "abducted" children, and, therefore excludes children believed to be runaways or throwaways from home.
 - e. Family abductions are not excluded provided the criteria are met and circumstances support activating the Pennsylvania Amber Alert Plan.
3. Upon confirmation of an abduction of a child which meets the criteria outlined in Section IV-C-2 of this policy, the Amber Alert plan shall be activated. Refer to the

Amber Alert Procedure in the Upper Merion Township Emergency Management Plan on the Police Computer Network.

D. MISSING ENDANGERED PERSON ALERT (MEPAS):

1. The Missing Endangered Person Alert System (MEPAS) is a response plan developed by the Pennsylvania State Police for missing persons who are at special risk of harm or injury. The MEPA Alert is sent to local media for distribution to the public, and also to local law enforcement, to assist in the recovery of the missing person. Following approval from a command or supervisory officer, The PSP Watch Center shall immediately be called (877-777-9975) when a MEPA Alert is being considered. It shall be the responsibility of the shift supervisor to make sure that the PSP Watch Center has been contacted. The PSP Watch Center has access to resources that may be helpful regardless of whether or not a MEPA Alert request meets the criteria and gets approved by the PA State Police for transmission.
2. The following criteria must be met before the MEPA Alert can be activated:
 - a. The incident circumstances do not meet the criteria for an Amber Alert; and,
 - b. The missing person(s) are missing under unexplained, involuntary or suspicious circumstances OR the persons age, health, mental or physical disability, environment or weather conditions, places the missing person in peril of serious bodily injury or death; and,
 - c. The dissemination of information to the public could assist in the safe recovery of a missing person(s).

E. FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION:

1. All missing person reports shall be forwarded, without delay, to the Investigations Division. The Investigations Division Commander, or his/her designee, shall assign the case for immediate investigation and follow-up if necessary, and insure that all required computer entries have been made.
2. If the investigation is still active, follow-up investigators shall re-contact the complainant, or parent or guardian of a child, to ascertain if the person has returned, or if there is any additional information to assist in locating the missing person.
3. Follow-up investigators shall make every reasonable effort to locate the missing person including, but not limited to, the following actions:
 - a. Contact hospitals and the coroner's office as appropriate for injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person.
 - b. Thoroughly check the location at which the missing person was last seen and conduct interviews as appropriate with persons who were with the person or who may frequent the area.

- c. Conduct interviews with additional family, friends, teachers, social workers, and others, as appropriate, to explore the potential for foul play, parental kidnapping or running away.
 - d. Maintain routine on-going contact with the missing person's closest relative(s) concerning the progress of the investigation. These and other relevant persons shall be informed that they must notify the police as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.
 - e. Provide identification information to all divisions of this department, the state police missing person's authority, neighboring police agencies, and, if parental or stranger-to-stranger abduction is suspected, the FBI.
 - f. Decisions to use local media to help locate missing persons shall be made with the approval of the Chief of Police, or his/her designee, and the missing person's family.
4. Any time a call is received indicating that a missing person has been located; an officer will be assigned to the call. The shift supervisor shall also be notified of the call. The recovering officer shall insure that:
 - a. The person receives medical attention in a timely manner, if necessary.
 - b. The circumstances surrounding the person's disappearance and return are investigated to include the identification of any persons who may be criminally responsible and/or whether an abusive or negligent home environment was a contributory factor.
 - c. The parents, guardians and/or the person reporting the missing person are notified in a timely manner.
 - d. A Supplementary Report is completed documenting the return of the missing person and containing details of the recovering officer's investigation.
 - e. All CLEAN/NCIC entries and regional messages are cancelled in a timely fashion.

F. NOTIFICATIONS:

1. The shift supervisor is responsible for ensuring that an e-mail is sent to the PD Command Group whenever a missing person investigation is initiated which results in a CLEAN/NCIC entry.
2. If the investigation determines that special circumstances exist (e.g. young child in the middle of the night, abduction, endangerment, etc.) the shift supervisor shall notify an on-duty, or the on-call Command Officer directly.

APPROVED: _____
Chief Thomas M. Nolan

DATED: _____

APPROVED: _____
Captain James M. Early

DATED: _____

TO BE REVIEWED: ANNUALLY
DISTRIBUTION: All police officers
All dispatchers
Township Manager
File