



# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

## MISSING PERSONS – CHILDREN & RUNAWAYS

EFFECTIVE: 11-16-2016

REVISED: N/A

DISTRIBUTION: ALL PERSONNEL

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines for the investigation and handling of reported missing children to ensure all missing children cases are investigated in a professional and timely manner.

**POLICY:** It is the policy of the Elyria Police Department to respond to and thoroughly investigate all reports of missing, abandoned or unidentified children in a timely manner and to take appropriate steps in compliance with federal and state laws governing the investigation of missing children, to resolve the case as soon as possible by locating the missing child. Investigating officers are required to determine, based on the individual circumstances of each case, the age of the missing person and whether foul play and suspicious circumstances exist. Any further action will be determined based upon that investigation. **(CALEA 41.2.6.A)**

### DEFINITIONS:

“Minor” (Child) means a person less than eighteen (18) years of age.

"Missing Child" for the purposes of this directive, means a minor child, who meets one or more of the following characteristics:

1. The minor is missing and there is reason to believe the minor could be the victim of a violation of section 2905.01 (Kidnapping), 2905.02 (Abduction), 2905.03 (Unlawful Restraint), or 2919.23 (Interference with Custody) of the Ohio Revised Code.
2. When it is reported that the minor has run away from, or who otherwise is missing from, the home, regardless of the length of time that the minor child has actually been missing or the number of times that the minor child has run away. For the purposes of this directive, “home” means the residence of, or the care, custody, and control of, the minor's parent(s); a parent who is the residential parent and/or legal custodian; guardian; legal custodian; or other person having responsibility for the care of the minor **(ORC 2901.30(A)(3)(a))**.

“Habitual Runaway Child” for the purposes of this directive, means a minor who has been previously reported as a runaway child to any law enforcement agency.

“Evidence of Foul Play” includes, but is not limited to, evidence that the person's home or car is in disarray, evidence of a struggle between the person and another person.

“Amber Alert” can be activated when the following criteria are met:

1. Law Enforcement confirms the child is under eighteen (18) years of age; **AND**
2. There is credible information to believe the abduction poses a credible threat of immediate danger or serious bodily harm or death to the child; **AND**
3. There is sufficient descriptive information about the child, the suspect, and/or the circumstances surrounding the abduction to believe that the activation of the alert will help locate the child; **AND**
4. The law enforcement agency determines that the child is not a runaway and has not been abducted as a result of a family abduction, unless the investigation determines the child is in immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death.

“Endangered Missing Child Alert” can be activated at the discretion of the law enforcement agency when the missing person is a minor, and the following criteria are met:

1. Law enforcement confirms the child is under 18 years of age; **AND**
2. Law enforcement confirms the child is missing, such as lost, non-witnessed/non-confirmed abduction or the child’s whereabouts are unknown; **AND**
3. Law enforcement believes the missing circumstances pose a credible threat of serious bodily harm or death to the child; **AND**
4. There is sufficient descriptive information about the child and the circumstances surrounding the disappearance that the alert activation will help locate the child.

## I. PROCEDURES

A. Reporting: **THERE IS NO WAITING PERIOD TO REPORT SOMEONE MISSING.** If, based on the report, the criteria for a “Missing Child” has been met, the officer shall take the report.

1. In accordance with Ohio Revised Code Section 2901.30(B), upon taking the report, the officer on behalf of the law enforcement agency, shall take prompt action upon it, including, but not limited to, concerted efforts to locate the missing child. No employee of this department shall prohibit or discourage the filing of or the taking of action upon a missing child report, within a specified period following the discovery or formulation of a belief that a minor is or could be a missing child. **IF IN DOUBT THE OFFICER SHALL COMPLETE A MISSING PERSON REPORT.**
2. If there is question regarding the jurisdiction over the handling and investigation of a reported missing child the following will apply:
  - a. If it is reported that any child’s disappearance originated within the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of Elyria, the officer shall handle and investigate the report in accordance with this directive.
  - b. If the origin of the child’s disappearance is unknown **AND** the last known location of the child was in the City of Elyria, the officer shall handle and investigate the report in accordance with this directive.
  - c. If origin of the child’s disappearance is unknown **AND** the missing child is a resident or temporarily residing within the City of Elyria, the officer shall handle and investigate the report in accordance with this directive.
  - d. If it is reported that the child’s disappearance originated outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of Elyria, the assigned officer will provide reasonable assistance to the reporting party to file the missing person report. This assistance shall include identifying the proper agency having jurisdiction and providing the phone number of the agency.
    1. If the report indicates that the missing child may be in the City of Elyria, the officer shall take concerted efforts to locate the missing child and shall assist the handling agency with locating the missing child, upon request or as directed.
    2. If the agency with proper jurisdiction refuses to assist or to accept the missing person’s report, the assigned officer shall handle and investigate the report in accordance with this directive.
  - e. Any additional circumstances, not already addressed, shall be communicated to the OIC for guidance on how the incident shall be handled.

**B. Initial Reporting and Response:**

1. When any party reports that a child is missing, abandoned or unidentified, the recipient of the report (Officer, Dispatcher, Other) will obtain as much information as possible from the person making the report and give out an immediate radio broadcast. This broadcast should include: **(CALEA 41.2.6.E)**
  - a. A physical description of the child and his/her clothing.
  - b. The last known location of the child.
  - c. Any known direction of travel or likely destination. (friends or family in area)
  - d. Any additional information that would assist in locating the child.
2. Generally one unit shall be dispatched to reports of missing, abandoned or unidentified children **UNLESS** it's reported that the child's safety may be in danger or his/her disappearance was not voluntary, or when there is evidence of foul play.
3. A Field Supervisor shall be notified and dispatched to the scene of all missing child reports whenever it's reported that the child's safety may be in danger, or his/her disappearance was not voluntary, or when there is evidence of foul play. **(CALEA 41.2.6.B)**
4. If information suggests that the missing child may be heading to another nearby jurisdiction, the Officer or Dispatcher shall promptly make a reasonable effort to notify appropriate and neighboring law enforcement agencies. Under these circumstances, notification should include the name and description of the child and any additional information that may assist with locating the missing child. When applicable, these notifications shall be recorded on the incident entry (ORC 2901.30(E)). **(CALEA 41.2.6.C & E)**

**C. Initial Investigation: (CALEA 41.2.6.E)**

1. An officer will be dispatched and assigned to conduct the preliminary investigation and initial follow up on all missing child cases. Until relieved of this responsibility, the assigned officer will investigate and gather information regarding the circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance, the child's physical and clothing description if known, confirm the age of the child, and obtain a current photo image (e.g. family or school photo, social media, etc.). **(CALEA 41.2.6.C)**
2. The assigned officer shall confirm and disseminate updated information as appropriate, ensuring that a BOL (Be On the Lookout) has been broadcasted and MDT message sent, as soon as adequate information becomes available. **(CALEA 41.2.6.C)**
3. If information indicates that the child's safety may be in danger or that his/her disappearance was not voluntary, or when there is evidence of foul play, the assigned officers shall:
  - a. Secure the area where the child was last seen and treat as a crime scene.
  - b. Notify the OIC and request investigative assistance.
  - c. Locate, separate and interview all witnesses.
  - d. Request additional resources as needed. (e.g. evidence technicians, search, canvass, etc.)
  - e. Conduct a search of immediate area where child went missing, as well as the child's home, including but not limited to all outbuildings and vehicles, as well as anywhere a child could hide or be hidden.

4. If the missing child meets all criteria to activate an Amber Alert or Endangered Missing Child notification, the assigned officer shall immediately notify the shift's OIC. The shift's OIC shall make notifications and initiate alerts as necessary or directed. See Amber Alert and Endangered Missing Child procedures below.
5. The officer shall ensure that appropriate waivers (e.g. dental, medical) are reviewed and signed by the parent or guardian. If this cannot be accomplished initially at the scene the officer shall complete this step during follow-up investigation. The officer shall instruct the parents or guardians to immediately notify the Police Department if the child returns or is located.
6. The officer shall conduct a preliminary investigation in an attempt to locate the missing child. The officer will make every reasonable effort to locate the missing child and/or develop additional leads.
7. If the officer receives information causing them to believe the missing child may be in another agency's jurisdiction, the officer shall notify that jurisdiction, provide information on the child, and request, if necessary, further follow up action by that jurisdiction's agency. **CALEA 41.2.6.C**
8. As soon as practicable, the assigned officer will return to the station and complete the Missing Persons Report form (EPD Form 506). The officer shall submit the report form to Records personnel when on-duty, or to Dispatch personnel when Records personnel are not on-duty, to be entered into LEADS/NCIC. This shall be accomplished IMMEDIATELY, but in any event, the child's information must be entered within two (2) hours of the filing of the report.
  - a. Based on the information received, missing children shall be entered into LEADS/NCIC in accordance with LEADS requirements and State Law. **CALEA 41.2.6.C**
  - b. Entering personnel shall attach the NCIC printout to the back of the original Missing Persons Report form.
  - c. The completed original report form will be given to the shift OIC. The OIC will review the form, ensuring that all appropriate fields and requirements are completed, before signing the form. The OIC shall forward a copy of the report form with a copy of the case report to the Investigative Division.
  - d. The original report form shall be filed alphabetically in the binder, in the records room until the child is located.
9. The assigned officer shall notify the parents or guardians of the missing child when the child's information is entered into LEADS/NCIC. The notification will be indicated on the Missing Person Report form and initialed by the notifying officer.
10. The officer shall complete a case report and narrative detailing all relevant facts of the incident.
  - a. The "Occurred Incident Type" shall be recorded as Missing Person.
  - b. The missing person shall be recorded as a "Subject Type" equaling "Missing Person".
  - c. The narrative shall describe the known facts and circumstances regarding the missing child's disappearance, any steps taken to locate the missing child, notifications made to other agencies and organizations, and any remaining leads that require further investigation.
  - d. Import and attach a photo image of the missing child to the case documents. This will allow the officer and other personnel immediate access to the child's photo in the future.
11. The OIC shall review the case report and narrative ensuring that all requirements have been completed (e.g. photo obtained, reasonable leads investigated, waivers signed, LEADS entry, notifications, etc.). The OIC shall add the missing child's information to the EPD Hot Sheet.

12. The officer shall continue the investigation until all reasonable leads have been exhausted or the conclusion of his/her shift. The investigating officer will notify the OIC if his/her shift ends without the missing child being located. The officer shall communicate to the OIC any remaining leads that still require follow-up.

D. Additional Investigative Considerations: **CALEA 41.2.6.E**

The Field Supervisor and investigative personnel shall follow sound investigative strategies. When circumstances indicate that the child's safety may be in danger and/or his/her disappearance was not voluntary, or when there is evidence of foul play, the following must be considered:

1. Seal/protect area of child's home where personal items can be located, such as hairbrush, toothbrush, soiled underwear, fingerprints that can be used for later search and/or identification purposes.
2. Initiate neighborhood canvass in area where child last observed and interview ALL persons. Note these actions in investigative reports.
3. With OIC approval, initiate roadblock canvass in area where child last observed.
4. Establish a department liaison with the family.
5. Request canine or professional search assistance.
6. Establish a command post away from the child's home or abduction area, if applicable.

E. Follow-Up Investigations and Case Assignment: **CALEA 41.2.6.E & F**

1. If the assigned officer concludes his/her shift without the missing child being located, and reasonable leads remain that require further investigation, the OIC will assign the investigation to another on-duty officer to follow up. The assigned officer shall complete a supplemental case narrative describing his/her follow-up actions. This process shall continue until all reasonable leads have been exhausted or the case is turned over to the Investigative Division
2. An officer will be dispatched to investigate any new leads received regarding the child's whereabouts.
3. If the missing child is not located, the incident will be forwarded to the Investigative Division for follow-up. If not already assigned, the responsibility for the follow-up investigation of reported missing children will be with the Investigative Division.
  - a. Each missing child case will be assigned to an investigator, who will monitor the progress of the investigation and maintain contact with the parent or guardian.
  - b. The assigned investigator will follow up on missing child cases.
  - c. The investigator shall make periodic contact with the reporting party in an attempt to identify if any new leads exist.
  - d. The assigned investigator is responsible for preparing a case file and updating the case activity and status.
  - e. If a photograph of the missing child has not yet been obtained, the investigator will obtain one and attach it to the case report documents.

- f. The assigned investigator shall ensure that dental records for the child are obtained and entered into NCIC prior to the 30th day of the child being missing, or at any time it is considered necessary for the investigation.
  1. The investigator shall provide the child's dentist with a copy of the dental waiver.
  2. The dentist is expected to encode the dental records in such form as to enable their entry into NCIC.
  3. The investigator shall submit a copy of the completed encoded dental records to Records for entry.
  4. Records personnel shall enter the dental records immediately, but in all cases the records must be entered into NCIC before thirty (30) days. The entering employee shall initial the Missing Person Report form confirming the entry.
  5. The investigator shall import a copy of the encoded dental records into the "Documents" section of the missing child's global subject jacket.
  6. The original dental records with encoded information shall be retained by the Investigative Division and added to the investigative file.
4. If after seven (7) days the missing child is not located, the assigned investigator will submit the case file to an Investigative Division supervisor. The supervisor will review the facts of the case and determine the appropriate course of action.

F. Located (Returned) Missing Children: **CALEA 41.2.6.E**

1. An officer shall be detailed to the scene of all located missing children found within the jurisdiction of the City of Elyria. If the child is located outside the City of Elyria, the officer shall confirm the return, based only upon credible information from an adult, and ensure that the parents or legal guardians are notified. If the return is questionable the officer shall notify the OIC for guidance.
2. Upon confirming the return or location of a missing child, the assigned officer shall:
  - a. Locate the original report in the RMS and add a supplemental narrative to the case.
    1. Include all pertinent information regarding the status of the missing child (e.g. alive, deceased, hospitalized, etc.)
    2. Identify the whereabouts of the missing child since he/she was reported missing, if determined or reported.
    3. Describe how the return was confirmed (e.g. in person, over the phone, etc.)
    4. If circumstances indicate that a criminal offense has occurred, the officer shall thoroughly investigate the matter, and if necessary notify the OIC to request assistance from Investigative Division personnel.
    5. Identify who retained custody of the child.
    6. Close the case with a disposition.
    7. If the child is determined to be a runaway (unruly-juvenile) the child shall be certified to juvenile court and the case subject type shall be changed from "Missing Person" to Juvenile-Suspect.
  - b. The officer shall complete the return portion of the Missing Person Report form and turn it in to the shift's OIC for review. The OIC will review and sign off on the report form to ensure that the missing child's information is taken out of LEADS and all appropriate reports, forms are filled out accordingly. This OIC shall remove the child's information from the Hot Sheet.

3. If an entry was made into LEADS/NCIC, the shift's OIC will direct Records/Dispatch personnel to cancel the entry. Records personnel shall promptly update and remove, as appropriate, missing child information in the LEADS/NCIC Missing Persons file. The LEADS/NCIC entry will be cleared and a copy of the printout will be attached to the back of the original copy of the Missing Persons Report.
4. Original and completed Missing Persons Report forms shall be pulled from the binder and forwarded to the Investigative Division. Investigative Division personnel will scan a copy of the completed report into the computer file.

## II. AMBER ALERT PROCEDURES (CALEA 41.2.6.D)

- A. The Elyria Police Department will participate in the AMBER Alert Program. The AMBER Alert program is designed to provide for the safe return of an abducted child. Experience has shown that in cases where children have been the victims of stranger abductions, there exists a limited opportunity for the safe return of the missing child. Quick action is imperative to improve the chances of the child being returned safely. There is a much lower chance of a child being injured if the child is abducted by a non-custodial parent. Therefore, the AMBER Alert is designed to be activated only under specific guidelines. The criteria for the activation of the alert are included in the **DEFINITIONS** section located at the top of the directive.
- B. The AMBER Alert is not to be used under the following circumstances:
  1. The missing child is believed to have run away from home, unless the investigation determines the child is in immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death.
  2. The missing child was taken by a non-custodial relative in a child custody case, unless the investigation determines the child is in immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death.
  3. The missing persons is an adult (eighteen years of age or older).
  4. Police search for other criminals not involving child abduction (murder, robbery etc.).
  5. The child is missing more than twenty-four (24) hours.
- C. The AMBER Alert can only be activated by a law enforcement agency. To activate the alert, the law enforcement agency shall do the following:
  1. The OIC shall instruct Records or Dispatch personnel to enter the child as an Amber Alert. The entering party shall follow the NCIC procedure involving a missing child entry. Complete the LEADS/NCIC Missing Persons Entry.
    - a. Control Field (MNP) = AA (AMBER Alert)
    - b. Message Key (MKE) = EME (Entry Endangered) or EMI (Entry Involuntary).
  2. For questions or issues regarding an AMBER Alert, contact the Ohio State Highway Patrol Communications Center (614) 466-2660 to speak with the AMBER Alert Duty Officer.

- D. The responsibility and decision for the activation of the AMBER Alert rests with the Chief of Police or any Division Commander. The shift OIC is responsible for gathering all of the relevant information and filling out the AMBER Alert forms to be used. The exact wording to be used by all media outlets will be provided by the Elyria Police Department. The information CECOMS needs to forward out to the media is in the AMBER Alert packets located in the OIC's office. The wording must not exceed two-hundred (200) words. The OIC shall attempt to get the liability release and "authorization for release of juvenile information" forms filled out and signed by the parent or guardian. However, it is recognized that the parent or guardian of the missing child will be extremely upset, so it is not mandatory for these two forms to be signed prior to activating the alert.
- E. The OIC shall notify an on-duty Investigative Division Supervisor or, during non-working hours, the on-call supervisor. The on call supervisor shall determine if investigative personnel will be assigned to work the case.
- F. The OIC should consider assigning extra staff to the dispatch center to assist in handling any calls involving the missing child. Dispatch personnel shall pass on any active alerts to on-coming or relieving Dispatchers.
- G. Canceling the Alert: If the child is confirmed to have been recovered, the AMBER Alert will be cancelled. In order to cancel the AMBER Alert, the OIC will first make contact with the Chief or Division Commander who approved the activation of the AMBER Alert. The OIC shall advise the approving officer of the circumstances of the child's return.
  - 1. Upon approval to cancel the alert, the OIC will then fax a Cancellation Fax form to CECOMS at both of the following fax numbers: 216-443-5705 and 216-698-3365. The cancellation forms must be on department letterhead and are located in the AMBER Alert packets in the OIC's office.
  - 2. Cancel the Entry in LEADS/NCIC by sending the LEADS cancellation screen. The AMBER Alert Duty Officer will contact the agency to discuss the alert cancellation after a time period of 48 hours.
  - 3. The OIC shall document the activation and cancelation on the Command Officers Report and ensure that all case reports and narratives are completed, updated and reviewed.

### III. ENDANGERED MISSING CHILD ALERT (CALEA 41.2.6.D)

There are situations where the Elyria Police Department will be investigating a missing child case, where the circumstances put the child's life in immediate danger, but for some reason the AMBER Alert criteria were not met for the case. The Endangered Missing Child Alert was created to alert the public to assist in locating the missing child. The criteria for the activation of the alert are included in the **DEFINITIONS** section located at the top of the directive.

- A. When the criteria are met for an Endangered Missing Child, the OIC shall determine if the alert shall be activated. If the alert is to be activated, the OIC shall instruct Records or Dispatch personnel to enter the child's information into NCIC/LEADS. Upon entering the missing child's information, the entering employee shall contact the Ohio Attorney General's Office, Missing Persons Unit at (855) BCI-OHIO (855-224-6446).

- B. The OIC shall notify an on-duty Investigative Division Supervisor or, during non-working hours, the on-call supervisor. The on call supervisor shall determine if investigative personnel will be assigned to work the case.
- C. The OIC should consider assigning extra staff to the dispatch center to assist in handling any calls involving the missing child. Dispatch personnel shall pass on any active alerts to on-coming or relieving Dispatchers.
- D. If the child is confirmed to have been recovered, the alert will be cancelled. In order to cancel the alert, the OIC will contact the Ohio Attorney General's Office, Missing Persons Unit at (855) BCI-OHIO (855-224-6446). The LEADS/NCIC entry shall be updated by Records or Dispatch.
- E. The OIC will document the activation and cancelation on the Command Officers Report and ensure that all case reports and narratives are completed, updated and reviewed.

#### IV. A CHILD IS MISSING PROGRAM (CALEA 41.2.6.D)

ACIM is a system that, when notified, will automatically dial up to one thousand phones listed in close physical proximity to the location of a missing person incident. Because of its potential impact on a community, the ACIM should not be activated for habitual runaway children, walk-aways from nursing or extended care facilities, or persons missing for more than twenty-four hours.

- A. If an officer is detailed to a missing child complaint, the officer will determine the type of missing child (length of time missing, runaway, overdue motorist or passenger, age, mental culpabilities, etc.). If the officer determines that the missing person should be entered into the ACIM program, the officer will contact a supervisor before making any contact with ACIM. The assigned officer will ascertain the following information and record it on a form to be used by ACIM:
  - 1. Name, age, date of birth
  - 2. Time and location last seen
  - 3. Physical description including clothes, scars, marks, tattoos, health/mental condition, etc.
- B. Once informed of the need for an ACIM alert, the OIC will ensure that ACIM is notified at 1-888-875-2246 and that the information is relayed to them. The OIC will also ensure that an ACIM follow-up form is begun and maintained until the case is closed or turned over to other investigative resources.
- C. The OIC should use discretion when activating ACIM. Unless specific circumstances dictate, ACIM should not be used between 2200-0700 hours. Remember, up to one thousand people can be notified by ACIM. Additionally, the chance of someone observing an individual in darkness is somewhat remote. Improper or overuse of the system can lead to persons called ignoring the appropriate alerts.
- D. Depending on specific circumstances, officers are reminded that the AMBER Alert system is available as a means of presenting information on a missing child to the general public.
- E. If an ACIM alert is activated, the OIC will note same on the Command Officer Report. If ACIM is activated and the missing person is not located before the end of the shift, the on-coming shift personnel will be advised of the activation. Dispatch will also be notified by the OIC of the ACIM activation so they are better prepared to collect and disseminate information about the person. Dispatch personnel shall pass on any active alerts to on-coming or relieving Dispatchers.
- F. Copies of the ACIM reports will be maintained in the OIC office, as well as in Records.

**V. COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES (ORC 2901.30(F))**

- A. Upon request by any law enforcement agency, department personnel shall provide assistance to, and cooperate with, other law enforcement agencies in their investigation of missing child cases. The information in any missing child report made to a law enforcement agency shall be made available, upon request, to law enforcement personnel of this state, other states, and the federal government when the law enforcement personnel indicate that the request is to aid in identifying or locating a missing child or the possible identification of a deceased minor who, upon discovery, cannot be identified.
- B. The investigating officer may obtain relevant information from other governmental agencies (Children's Services, schools, courts, probationary officers, etc.) on a case involving the report of a missing child. Officers will work with and cooperate, in the interests of professionalism, with other agencies as may be required in the investigation or as may be requested by respective agencies.

**VI. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

The Ohio Missing Person Alert Guidebook can be accessed in the shared folders.

W:\Manuals\Missing Persons

Ohio Child Abduction Response Team (C.A.R.T) provides additional investigative and search team resources. C.A.R.T. can be contacted at 855-BCI-OHIO (855-224-6446)

During an active alert, contact can be made with the OSHP Hub/Columbus Communications Center at 614-466-2660.

The Ohio Missing Children Clearinghouse was established in 1993 under Ohio Revised Code (ORC) Section 109.65(B) and serves as a central repository of statistics and information about missing children in the State of Ohio.

The Ohio Attorney General’s Office, Missing Persons Unit provides a toll-free hotline, (855) BCI-OHIO, to field calls from law enforcement, parents, community members, and the media. The hotline is answered 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Duane P. Whitely  
Chief of Police

**AUTHORITY**

**SUPERCEDES:** Policy 4.32 – Missing Children rescinded as of the effective date of this directive.  
Special Order-2002-08-Amber Alert Policy rescinded as of the effective date of this directive.  
Special Order 2003-12-A Child is Missing rescinded as of the effective date of this directive.

**CROSS REFERENCE TO DIRECTIVES:** ORC 2901.30 – Missing Child Reports, LEADS Manual-Missing Persons

**CROSS REFERENCE TO STANDARDS:** CALEA 41.2.6

**CROSS REFERENCE TO FORMS:** Missing Person Report (EPD Form 506)