



PORTAGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
Law Enforcement

Policies and Procedures

Subject: Missing Persons Investigations	Policy Number: 7.05
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Approval Authority Title and Signature: Sheriff David W.	

POLICY:

The Portage County Sheriff's Office exercises diligent care in the conduct of missing person inquiries and investigations.

DISCUSSIONS:

The effectiveness of statewide or National Crime Information Center [NCIC] communication networks depend on accurate and prompt entry data from local agencies that use these resources. This is especially important in *missing persons* cases. To ensure system effectiveness, it is also important to cancel entries when the missing person is located or assistance is no longer required.

Telecommunications operators making entries must use their best efforts to place accurate and complete information into the system without unreasonable delays.

PROCEDURES:

General Guidelines - Missing Persons:

The following guidelines apply to missing person's cases:

1. Officers receiving missing persons reports collect and evaluate information (pictures, descriptions, last seen data, and likely places to frequent, etc.), and investigate possible leads provided by the reporting person.
2. In situations involving missing juveniles, the investigating officer should take immediate action to confirm that the youth is missing (i.e. search of the residence, check schools, friend's homes, local stores, parks, etc.).

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3. An entry/deletion form is completed to establish that missing persons are entered into the statewide or National Crime Information Center systems and subsequently deleted once located.

Missing Persons – Receiving a Telephone Call:

Officers receiving a *missing person* notification utilize the following procedures:

1. Interview the reporting person and evaluate the information received.
 - a. If the information fits the following criteria [one or a combination of items may surface in the discretion of the officer] for a missing person, complete an *initial missing persons report*. The criteria is:
 - i. Person has not followed an established routine;
 - ii. Person has not been heard from or seen in the last 24 hours;
 - iii. Person left a child unattended or themselves is a juvenile;
 - iv. Person has been despondent, depressed, or under stress recently;
 - v. Person is physical or mentally disabled or is has some form of dementia (senility, Alzheimer's, etc);
 - vi. Reporting person is reasonably justified to suspect foul *play*; &
 - vii. Other similar issues.
 - b. If the information does not fit the criteria for a missing person, offer referrals to the person reporting the incident. **If in doubt, always make a report.**
2. Investigations and reports should include detailed information concerning last known location, associates, habits, locations frequented, clothing descriptions, etc. Investigating officers should determine the circumstances leading up to the disappearance and obtain a recent photograph of the missing person, if available.
3. Submit the initial report and a completed statewide or National Crime Information Center entry/deletion form to the appropriate official for review.
4. After review and approval, the reviewing authority forwards the report and the entry/deletion form to a certified statewide or National Crime Information Center operator or the Communications Center.
5. Operator receiving these documents enters the information into the system. A copy of the entry printout is attached to the other documents submitted.

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6. Operator making the entry submits all the stated documents to the proper investigative authority for further follow up investigation.

Missing Person Entries:

A missing person record may be entered into the statewide or NCIC for a person of any age for the following reasons:

1. Missing person is under proven physical/mental disability or dementia, thereby possibly subjecting self or others to personal and immediate danger.
2. Circumstances surrounding the missing person indicate a non-voluntary abduction or kidnapping.
3. Report regarding the missing person is declared un-emancipated.
4. Person is reported missing after a disaster.

Proper Documentation:

When a person is declared missing, proper documentation verifying that fact must be established. Examples of acceptable documentation are:

1. Missing persons report, prepared as a result of investigation by a law enforcement officer.
2. Written statement from a physician or other authoritative source, which verifies a missing person's physical/mental disability.
3. Written statement from a parent, guardian, next of kin, or other authoritative source advising that the missing person is in danger or that their disappearance was not voluntary.

Missing Person Deletions:

When a missing person is located or information received requiring a state or National Crime Information Center deletion, the following procedures must be followed:

1. Officer locating the missing person or developing information that requires a deletion is responsible for completing the deletion process.
2. Reporting person or the family of the missing person is contacted and informed of the information obtained.

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3. Officer locates the initial report and complete the state or National Crime Information Center deletion form attached to the report. If the initial report is unavailable, the officer must prepare a separate deletion form.
4. Officer submits the deletion form to a certified state or National Crime information Center operator for deletion from the system.
5. Communications operator receiving notification that the missing person has been located, or that the investigating officer wants to clear or cancel the person, must follow state or National Crime Information Center guidelines and clear the entry from the system.
6. Once the entry has been deleted, the operator attaches a deletion print out to the submitted documents to be returned to the officer assigned to the investigation.
7. The assigned investigative officer signs the deletion form after reviewing the case circumstances and submits the form to the appropriate supervisor who also signs the deletion form. The officer completes a supplemental report detailing the information received that led to the deletion.
8. Once the missing person report is cleared, it is filed, along with all other documents, in accordance with agency policy on records.

Wilderness searches:

When circumstances indicate that the missing person may be “lost,” or located in a remote area and is injured or disoriented, the primary investigator, with approval of the Sheriff, may initiate a search effort. The agency serves as the lead agency in the search, and asks for support from other law enforcement agencies, fire, EMS and perhaps volunteer agencies as needed, depending upon the size of the search area and difficulty of terrain.

The Sheriff and/or the Sheriff’s Designee serves as the incident commander (IC) and operations are coordinated under the Incident Command System. The Incident Commander (IC) should be capable of:

1. Establishing objectives;
2. Establishing priorities;
3. Developing search strategies, objectives, and tactics;
4. Delegating responsibilities; &
5. Communicating effectively.

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The keys to successful wilderness searches are limiting the search area and then looking for clues to the subjects' location. The Incident Commander (IC) will:

1. Consider intelligence from the initial investigation and attempt to determine the last known position of the search subject(s);
2. Assign a number of patrols to monitor the outside perimeter of the search area. (Many search subjects have been located when they walk to a road or trail);
3. Assign an investigator to check other locations where the subject(s) may be such as at home, at the home of acquaintances, bars, taverns, etc;
4. Protect any clues or evidence, including scent trails, at the Last Known Position (LKP) from disturbance or contamination;
5. Assign a small number of experienced/skilled persons (hasty team) to search the immediate area surrounding the LKP to look for evidence that may indicate direction of travel;
6. Request a trained canine with handler to attempt to track and locate the subject;
7. Request air reconnaissance assistance from law enforcement or civil aviation authorities;
8. Assign an officer or qualified civilian to remain with the family or friends of the missing subject in order to communicate search efforts and to continue gathering information that may be clues to the subject's location; &
9. Not allow a large number of individuals to conduct a "grid search" until other, more effective search techniques have been exhausted.

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