

DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER 07-07

OFFICE of the CHIEF OF POLICE
REPLACES: General Order 04-10/04-10A
SOP 501.17.00

DATE: January 10, 2007

MISSING CHILDREN REGIONAL AND STATEWIDE ALERT SYSTEM

I. PURPOSE.

To establish guidelines in regard to the department's responsibilities in investigating missing or abducted children, including protocols to activate either or both of the St. Louis Area Regional Abduction Alert program, and the Missouri Amber Alert system.

II. DEFINITIONS.

Abduction – To take away by force.

Kidnapping – The seizure of a person by unlawfully removing them from where he or she is found, or by unlawfully confining them for a substantial period of time, for the purpose of ransom or reward, or any other act prior to the return or release of the victim(s).

Missing Child – A person sixteen (16) years of age or younger whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent, guardian, or responsible party. This may involve children missing for a variety of reasons and varying periods of time depending upon the child's age, disability, and whether the absence was due to an injury.

Unusual Circumstances – A missing child who is thirteen (13) years of age or younger, or believed to be: 1. Out of the safety zone for his or her age and developmental stage; 2. Mentally diminished; 3. Drug dependent, including both prescription and illicit substances; 4. A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation; 5. In a life threatening situation; 6. Absent from home for more than twenty-four hours before being reported missing; 7. Believed

to be with others who could endanger his or her welfare; and 8. Is absent under circumstances inconsistent with established patterns of behavior.

III. GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT.

It shall be the policy of this agency to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing or lost children. In addition, this department holds that every child reported as missing or lost will be considered “at risk” until information to the contrary is developed.

Jurisdictional conflicts are to be avoided when a child is reported missing or lost. If a missing child resides in, or was last seen in this jurisdiction, the department will immediately initiate an investigation and/or related search, as circumstances dictate. If a child resides in this jurisdiction, and was last seen in another jurisdiction, but the law enforcement agency covering that agency chooses not to take a missing child report, this agency will assume reporting and investigative responsibility.

In regard to questions concerning parental custody, this department will initiate a missing child report even if custody has not been formally established. Reporting parties shall be encouraged to obtain legal custody as soon as possible. However, since the safety of the missing child(ren) is paramount, members of this agency will open a case when it can be shown that the child has been removed or is missing from his/her usual place of residence.

In the case of an unidentified child, whether living or deceased, the investigating officers will obtain as complete a physical description as possible and will enter the data into the NCIC Unidentified Missing Person File. Officers will then utilize all available resources to aid in the identification of the child, while the child itself is placed under the protection of DPS. Should the child be identified, officers will take whatever legal action is necessary and prudent against the parents or legal guardians. Once identification has been confirmed, all notifications will be cancelled.

IV. TYPES OF MISSING CHILD CASES.

Officers should be aware that they may encounter differing types of missing child cases, each with its own unique response requirements. These are:

- A. Kidnapping (stranger abduction) – Where a child is taken by an unknown individual, through force or persuasion, usually in furtherance of additional victimization.
- B. Family abduction – A non-custodial family member flees with a child, usually in direct violation of a court ordered custody arrangement.

- C. Runaway child – Most often a teenager, who leaves home voluntarily for a variety of reasons.
- D. Lost child – A child who becomes separated from parents or caretakers under circumstances where evidence of foul play is absent or highly unlikely.
- E. Throwaway – A child who has runaway and the caretaker makes no effort to recover the child, or who has been abandoned or deserted.

V. RESPONSE PROCEDURES.

To provide the most effective law enforcement response during the critical early hours of a missing child case, the following procedural guideline will aid decision making by department personnel throughout the various phases of the investigation.

A. Communications

1. Dispatch staff will determine if the circumstances of the initial report meet the definition of a missing child as set forth in Section II.
2. Dispatch will immediately assign an officer to the scene of the report.
3. Obtain as much pertinent descriptive information as possible concerning the victim, suspect, etc. (e.g. time frame, physical and clothing description, other related data) and broadcast same to other patrol units and adjacent municipalities.
4. Notify the patrol supervisor of the situation.
5. Log the call information in the appropriate manner via computer.

B. First Responders

The officer who is initially assigned to a report of a missing/lost child will be responsible to:

1. Respond promptly to the scene. Have assist unit check the immediate area.
2. Interview parents or caretaker making the initial report. Where was child last seen and by whom? What was child doing? Determine identity of child's friends, favorite haunts, and current family, school or personal problems, if any.

Also record if the child has access to an on-line computer, cell phone, or pager.

Determine if the child has physical, emotional, or drug-related handicaps.

3. Obtain a detailed physical description of the missing/lost child. Secure a recent photograph of the child.
4. Verify that the child is in fact missing. Recheck residence and surrounding grounds. Identify the child's zone of safety consistent with his/her age and development stage.
5. Confirm the child's custody status as a past or pending divorce may be influencing the child's behavior.
6. Identify the circumstances of the disappearance. Contingent upon the initial assessment, make a preliminary determination as to the type of incident.
7. Interview the individual who last had contact with the child and any witnesses.
8. Obtain a description of suspected abductors and other related information, if any. Relay updated and other pertinent descriptive information to the dispatch center for broadcast to other patrol units and law enforcement agencies.
9. Contingent upon the officer's initial assessment that the circumstances surrounding the missing/lost child may pose a threat to the child's safety, the first responder will request a supervisor and field investigator assist at the scene.
10. Seize any video/security tapes if incident occurred in a public place.
11. Secure the scene for evidence processing.
12. Prepare incident report and complete necessary forms.

Determine if any registered sex offenders/pedophiles live in or around the incident scene.

Instruct communications center to submit appropriate messages to REJIS/NCIC.

C. Supervisors

The field supervisor assigned to oversee a missing/lost child case will be responsible to:

1. Obtain a briefing from the officer assigned to the case.
2. Determine if additional personnel (e.g. detectives, field investigators, search dog teams, etc.) and resources are needed to assist at the scene.
3. Advise communications to notify the platoon and bureau commanders of the incident, particularly if “unusual circumstances” are present to place the safety of the child in jeopardy.
4. Establish a field command post.
5. Organize and coordinate systematic search efforts.
6. Authorize SAARA and Amber Alerts, as required.
7. Provide status report to victim’s family, and coordinate counseling /medical treatment for family as needed.
8. Ensure that all appropriate notifications are made.
9. Ensure that all agency policies and procedures are observed.
10. Brief command rank officers upon their arrival at scene.
11. Control news media at scene and refer media inquiries to Chief of Police.
12. Review and approve incident reports and associated paperwork.

D. Investigators

The detective/officer assigned to investigate a missing child case will be responsible to:

1. Obtain a briefing from law enforcement personnel on the scene.
2. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information.
3. Conduct or coordinate a thorough canvass of the area.

4. Coordinate the gathering of any physical evidence.
5. Interview family members, witnesses, etc. in regard to the case, and to obtain a brief history of recent family dynamics.
6. Explore the basis for conflicting information.
7. Effectively manage case information. Present regular status reports to the victim's family.
8. Evaluate the need for additional resources and specialized services.
9. Update and disseminate descriptive information.
10. Identify criminal suspect(s) if foul play involved in disappearance.

VI. RECOVERY/CLOSURE PROCEDURES.

An investigator or officer who is assigned to the recovery or return of a missing child will be responsible to:

1. Verify that the returned child is, in fact, the reported missing child.
2. Coordinate the return of the child to their home, if the child was recovered in another jurisdiction.
3. Arrange for intervention services (medical and counseling), if indicated.
4. Attempt to interview the child as to their locations, activities, and companions while gone from home.
5. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding computer entries and other notifications.
6. Assist prosecuting attorney with criminal prosecution, as necessary.

VII. REGIONAL ALERT SYSTEM

The St. Louis Area Regional Abduction Alert (SARAA) is a cooperative effort between the area's law enforcement agencies, and local radio and television stations. Designed to provide immediate news media saturation coverage of any child kidnapping or abduction, the program will utilize the Emergency Alert System (EAS) to broadcast information relative to the incident in all of the fifteen (15) counties that are part of the St. Louis EAS operation. KMOX-AM 1120 will serve as the primary EAS station. Areas that will be served in Missouri include: Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, St. Charles, St. Louis and Warren counties, in addition to the independent city of St. Louis. Areas that will be served in Illinois include: Bond, Clinton, Jersey, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair, and Washington counties.

The intent of the program is to provide the public with descriptive and other pertinent information about a child abduction/kidnapping incident in as rapid a manner as possible. Participating media outlets will broadcast incident information at least twice an hour for the first two hours, followed by additional alerts every hour for the next twenty hours. Beyond that time, media organizations will use their own discretion to continue the broadcasts or suspend same.

Such quick and repeated broadcast coverage will not only raise public awareness of the situation, but also provide the greatest chance for the safe return of the abducted child and subsequent arrest of the perpetrator(s).

Both the regional SARAA alert system and the Missouri AMBER alert system were designed as a public-private partnership to disseminate urgent notifications to the public by all available means. As such, once proper notification procedures have been made to KMOX radio station, information will not only be disseminated throughout the state via repetitive radio and television broadcasts, but also the state MULES computer network, and private entities that interact with the general public. To compliment the preceding avenues of transmission, the Missouri Department of Transportation will be automatically notified by KMOX of each SAARA alert, and in turn, will:

1. Broadcast the SAARA message via radio to each of its employees.
2. Place the information on its permanent and temporary highway message boards.
3. Insert the alert as the lead item in its traffic information hotline.

VIII. SARAA BROADCAST CRITERIA.

After being apprised that an incident report involving a child kidnapping or abduction has been initiated by this department, the on-duty supervisor or commander will be responsible for making a decision to activate the SARAA program. This decision will be made after a review has been made of the facts surrounding the incident, and determining if the event meets the SARAA notification criteria.

The four required SARAA broadcast criteria are:

- A. The child is sixteen (16) years of age or younger, and the law enforcement agency believes the child has been kidnapped as defined in RSMo 565.110.
- B. The law enforcement agency believes the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.
- C. A law enforcement investigation has taken place that verified the kidnapping or eliminated alternative explanations.
- D. Sufficient information is available to disseminate to the public that could assist in locating the child, alleged suspect, or suspect's vehicle. Prior to the issuance of a SAARA alert, except under exigent circumstances, the reporting officer will have the parent or guardian of the child sign a liability waiver.

If all four of the criteria are met, the supervisor will generally request a SARAA broadcast. However, there may be exigent circumstances involving a child kidnapping in which a decision is made not to initiate the SARAA program.

If all four of the above criteria are not met, no SARAA broadcast will be requested.

The following situations are examples when SARAA requirements would be met:

- 1). A child is kidnapped off the street.
- 2). A child is kidnapped from his/her home.
- 3). Kidnappings where a child is taken by an adult without parental consent.
- 4). A vehicle is stolen or car-jacked and a child was left inside the vehicle.
- 5). A child is reported missing, there is evidence of foul play, and police believe the child was kidnapped.

The following situations are examples when SARAA requirements would not be met:

- 1). Missing children who have run away from home.
- 2). Missing children involved in child custody suits (parental kidnappings).
- 3). Missing person is seventeen (17) years or older.
- 4). Police searches for criminals.

IX. MISSOURI AMBER ALERT CRITERIA.

The Missouri Amber Alert broadcast criteria are:

- 1). There has been an abduction.
- 2). There are sufficient details concerning the abduction to make a public alert useful.

Custodial disputes do not qualify unless there is a credible threat of serious bodily injury or death.

X. SARAA NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES.

Upon conducting a review of the incident report and determining that the SARAA broadcast criteria have been satisfied, the on-duty supervisor shall complete the SARAA Notification Fax form. The supervisor will then immediately follow this up by calling the KMOX news editor to notify the radio station that a facsimile is being sent to their facility (appropriate phone numbers are included on the form).

The Fax shall then be sent to KMOX, at which time the news editor will review same, again confirm the broadcast criteria, and put the information into the proper EAS format.

The news editor will subsequently call the reporting law enforcement supervisor to acknowledge receipt of the Fax, ask any additional questions, and to obtain the supervisor's approval of the final wording of the SARAA message to be broadcast. A text copy of the intended broadcast will be forwarded by Fax to the issuing law enforcement agency.

Whenever possible, a recent photograph of the child should be obtained with the intent of transmitting it to all television and print media outlets in the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

The supervisor will attach copies of both the original Fax and the return receipt to the incident report. In addition, the Chief of Police and the Commander of the Field Operations Bureau shall be contacted in regard to the incident and SARAA broadcast as soon as practical.

As updated information about the child or suspect becomes available, the supervisor should send timely updates to KMOX using the same procedures as outlined above.

Once a child has been found or the case closed, the on-duty supervisor or commander must cancel the SARAA alert program by first calling KMOX radio station, and then faxing a cancellation form providing the necessary recovery or closure information.

XI. MISSOURI AMBER ALERT NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES.

The law enforcement agency responsible for the investigation into the child abduction shall verify that the alert criteria have been satisfied and that a local or regional alert has been issued. The initiating agency will then complete and Fax the Amber Alert Abduction form and any attachments to the Missouri Highway Patrol who will disseminate the information to their partners. The Missouri Department of Public Safety will have the authority to notify other regions of the state upon verification that alert criteria have been met.

XII. NOTIFICATION FORMS.

The department shall utilize the St. Louis Regional Abduction Alert Notification (SARAA) form (Refer attachment), and the Missouri Amber Alert Abduction form (Refer attachment). The master copy of each shall be maintained by the Administrative Division in the appropriate forms manual.

XIII. INCIDENT REVIEW.

After each SARAA activation, the law enforcement supervisor and the department's official representative to the program shall meet with the SARAA Committee to review the case, evaluate whether proper procedures were followed by the participants, and recommend any changes in agency procedures or the Regional Abduction Alert Plan.

BY ORDER OF:

THOMAS J. BYRNE
Chief of Police

TJB:dld

CALEA Reference: 41.2.4/41.2.6/41.2.7