

## Missing Persons

### 331.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidance for handling missing person investigations.

#### 331.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

**High risk** - This includes persons who:

- (a) Are 12 years of age or younger.
- (b) Regardless of age, are believed or determined to be experiencing one or more of the following circumstances:
  - 1. Missing under unexplained, involuntary or suspicious circumstances and is believed to be in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, in combination with environmental or weather conditions, or it is believed that the person is unable to return to safety without assistance.
  - 2. Out of the zone of safety for his/her chronological age and developmental stage.
  - 3. Mentally or behaviorally disabled.
  - 4. Drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency is potentially life-threatening.
  - 5. Absent from home for more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement as missing.
  - 6. In a life-threatening situation.
  - 7. In the company of others who could endanger his/her welfare.
  - 8. Absent in a way that is inconsistent with established patterns of behavior and cannot be readily explained. Most children have an established and reasonably predictable routine.
  - 9. Involved in a situation that would cause a reasonable person to conclude the person should be considered at risk.

**Missing person** - Any person who is reported missing to law enforcement when that person's location is unknown.

(a) **Missing adult** – A person 18 years of age or older, and whose absence is contrary to their normal pattern of behavior.

(b) **Missing child** – A person 17 years of age or younger and whose whereabouts are unknown to such individual's legal custodian.

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**Missing person networks** - Databases or computer networks that are available to law enforcement and are suitable for obtaining information related to missing person investigations. This includes the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and the Washington Crime Information Center (WACIC).

### **331.2 POLICY**

The Vancouver Police Department does not consider any report of a missing person to be routine and assumes that the missing person is in need of immediate assistance until an investigation reveals otherwise. The Vancouver Police Department gives missing person cases priority over property-related cases and does not require a specific amount of time to have passed before beginning a missing person investigation.

### **331.3 REQUIRED FORMS AND BIOLOGICAL SAMPLE COLLECTION KITS**

The Digital Evidence Cybercrime Unit (DECU) supervisor shall ensure the following forms and kits are developed and available:

- Electronic police report
- Missing person investigation checklist that provides investigation guidelines and resources that could be helpful in the early hours of a missing person investigation
- Missing person school notification form
- Medical records release form
- Biological sample collection kits

### **331.4 ACCEPTANCE OF REPORTS**

Any officer encountering a person who wishes to report a missing person or runaway shall render assistance without delay. This is accomplished by accepting the report in-person and initiating the investigation. Those officers who do not take such reports or who are unable to give immediate assistance shall promptly dispatch or alert an officer who can take the report.

A report shall be accepted in all cases and regardless of where the person was last seen, where the person resides or any question of jurisdiction.

### **331.5 INITIAL INVESTIGATION**

Officers or other members conducting the initial investigation of a missing person should take the following investigative actions, as applicable:

- (a) Respond to a dispatched call as soon as practicable.
- (b) Interview the reporting person and any witnesses to determine whether the person qualifies as a missing person and, if so, whether the person may be at risk.
- (c) Notify a supervisor immediately if there is evidence that a missing person is either at risk or may qualify for a public alert, or both (see the Public Alerts Policy).

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- (d) Broadcast a “Be on the Look-Out” (BOLO) bulletin if the person is under 18 years of age or there is evidence that the missing person is at risk. The BOLO should be broadcast as soon as practicable but in no event more than one hour after determining the missing person is under 18 years of age or may be at risk.
- (e) Ensure that entries are made into WACIC/NCIC and over the Mobile Data Computer (MDC), as follows:
  - 1. Immediately, when the missing person is at risk or is 21 years of age and under .
  - 2. In all other cases, as soon as practicable, but not later than two hours from the time of the initial report.
- (f) At minimum, the following information shall be entered into WACIC/NCIC and MDC for a missing child:
  - 1. Name, date of birth, sex, race, height, weight, eye color, and hair color.
  - 2. The date and location of the last known contact with the child.
  - 3. The circumstances under which the child is reported missing.
- (g) Complete the appropriate report forms accurately and completely and initiate a search as applicable under the facts.
- (h) Collect and/or review:
  - 1. A photograph and fingerprint card of the missing person, if available.
  - 2. Any documents that may assist in the investigation, such as court orders regarding custody.
  - 3. Any other evidence that may assist in the investigation, including personal electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, computers).
- (i) Contact the appropriate agency if the report relates to a missing person report previously made to another agency and that agency is actively investigating the report. When this is not practicable, the information should be documented in an appropriate report for transmission to the appropriate agency. If the information relates to a high-risk missing person, the member should notify a supervisor and proceed with reasonable steps to locate the missing person.
- (j) Contact the DECU supervisor for additional resources or response.
- (k) Consider contacting the Washington State Patrol's (WSP) Missing and Exploited Children's Task Force (MECTF) if additional resources are needed (RCW 13.60.110).

### 331.6 REPORT PROCEDURES AND ROUTING

The responding officer should complete all missing person electronic reports, tabs and forms promptly and advise the appropriate on-duty supervisor as soon as a missing person report is ready for review.

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If there is an exigency to accomplish a missing person report and the officer does not have access to the electronic report writing system on scene, then the Vancouver Police Department Missing Person Form should be completed and used to make the proper notifications.

In every case of a missing person, the Vancouver Police Department Dental Information Form must be completed and signed by the reporting party or guardian of the missing person.

[See attachment: 331 Missing Persons Report - Revised July 2014.pdf](#)

### **331.6.1 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

If the missing person is high risk, the on-duty supervisor shall respond and ensure resources are deployed as appropriate. If necessary, notify the DECU supervisor for assistance and ensure applicable notification and public alerts are made.

The supervisor shall review and approve missing person reports upon receipt. The reports should be promptly sent to the Records Division and entered into the appropriate missing person networks.

The supervisor should also take reasonable steps to identify and address any jurisdictional issues to ensure cooperation among agencies. If the case falls within the jurisdiction of another agency, the supervisor should facilitate transfer of the case to the agency of jurisdiction.

### **331.6.2 RECORDS DIVISION RESPONSIBILITIES**

The receiving records member shall:

- (a) As soon as reasonable under the circumstances, notify and forward a copy of the report to the agency of jurisdiction for the missing person's residence in cases where the missing person is a resident of another jurisdiction.
- (b) Notify and forward a copy of the report to the agency of jurisdiction where the missing person was last seen.
- (c) Notify and forward a copy of the report to the agency of jurisdiction for the missing person's intended or possible destination, if known.
- (d) Forward a copy of the report to the DECU supervisor.

### **331.7 INVESTIGATIONS FOLLOW-UP**

The detective assigned to a missing person investigation:

- (a) Should ensure the missing person's school has been contacted to verify that the student's transcripts had not been transferred.
- (b) Should re-contact the reporting person and/or other witnesses within 30 days of the initial report and within 30 days thereafter to determine if any additional information has become available.
- (c) Should consider contacting other agencies involved in the case to determine if any additional information is available.

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- (d) Shall verify and update WACIC, NCIC and any other applicable missing person networks within 60 days of the original entry into the networks and every 45 days thereafter until the missing person is located (42 USC § 5780).
- (e) Should continue to make reasonable efforts to locate the missing person and document these efforts at least every 45 days.
- (f) Shall maintain a close liaison with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children® (NCMEC) if the missing person is under the age of 21 (42 USC § 5780).
- (g) Should obtain and forward medical records and X-rays, photos, dental X-rays and biological samples, as applicable to the Washington State Patrol (WSP) Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit (MUPU).
- (h) Should attempt to obtain the most recent photograph for persons under 18 years of age if it has not been obtained previously and forward the photograph to the WSP Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit (MUPU).
- (i) Should make appropriate entries and searches in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).

### 331.7.1 MISSING OVER 30 DAYS OR WHEN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY SUSPECTED

When a person reported missing has not been found within 30 days of the report or at any time when criminal activity is suspected, the handling detective shall contact the county coroner or medical examiner to determine if that office has any information concerning the missing person. If, after conferring with the coroner or medical examiner, the person is still determined to be missing, the handling officers shall complete the following:

- (a) File a missing person's report with MUPU.
- (b) Initiate the collection of biological samples from the known missing person and his/her family members for nuclear and mitochondrial DNA testing along with the necessary consent forms, if not previously obtained during the investigation.
- (c) Ask the missing person's family or next of kin to give written consent to request the person's dental records.
  1. Whenever possible, obtain diagnostic quality copies or original records of the missing person's dental records. As soon as possible, biological samples shall be submitted to the appropriate lab; dental records shall be submitted to MUPU (RCW 43.43.751; RCW 68.50.320).

In all missing person cases, the assigned detective should attempt contact with the reporting party no less than every three months in order to verify the status of the reported missing person. After 12 months, contact with the reporting party should be attempted yearly. All verifications should be reported to WSP via A Central Computerized Enforcement Service System (ACCESS).

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### **331.8 WHEN A MISSING PERSON IS FOUND**

When any person reported missing is found, the assigned detective shall document the location of the missing person in the appropriate report, notify the reporting party and other involved agencies and refer the case for additional investigation if warranted.

The Records Division should ensure that, upon receipt of information that a missing person has been located, the following occurs:

- (a) Notification is made to MUPU.
- (b) Entries are made in the applicable missing person networks.
- (c) Notification shall be made to any other law enforcement agency that took the initial report or participated in the investigation.

If a missing person is an adult and does not want the reporting party to know their location, the officer will not disclose their location.

#### **331.8.1 UNIDENTIFIED PERSONS**

Department members investigating a case of an unidentified person who is deceased or a living person who cannot assist in identifying him/herself should:

- (a) Obtain a complete description of the person.
- (b) Enter the unidentified person's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
- (c) Use available resources, such as those related to missing persons, to identify the person through NamUs.

### **331.9 CASE CLOSURE**

The Investigations Lieutenant may authorize the closure of a missing person case after considering the following:

- (a) Closure is appropriate when the missing person is confirmed returned or evidence matches an unidentified person or body.
- (b) If the missing person is a resident of Vancouver or this Department is the lead agency, the case should be kept under active investigation for as long as the person may still be alive. Exhaustion of leads in the investigation should not be a reason for closing a case.
- (c) If this Department is not the lead agency, the case can be made inactive if all investigative leads have been exhausted, the lead agency has been notified and entries are made in the applicable missing person networks as appropriate.
- (d) A missing person case should not be closed or reclassified because the person would have reached a certain age or adulthood or because the person is now the subject of a criminal or civil warrant.

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### **331.10 TRAINING**

Subject to available resources, the Training Sergeant should ensure that members of this Department whose duties include missing person investigations and reports receive training that includes:

- (a) The initial investigation:
  - 1. Assessments and interviews.
  - 2. Confirming missing status and custody status of minors.
  - 3. Evaluating the need for a heightened response.
  - 4. Identifying the zone of safety based on chronological age and developmental stage.
- (b) Briefing of Department members at the scene.
- (c) Identifying NCIC Missing Person File categories (e.g., disability, endangered, involuntary, juvenile and catastrophe).
- (d) Verifying the accuracy of all descriptive information.
- (e) Initiating a neighborhood investigation.
- (f) Investigating any relevant recent family dynamics.
- (g) Addressing conflicting information.
- (h) Key investigative and coordination steps.
- (i) Managing a missing person case.
- (j) Additional resources and specialized services.
- (k) Update procedures for case information and descriptions.
- (l) Preserving scenes.
- (m) Internet and technology issues (e.g., Internet use, cell phone use).
- (n) Media relations.