

**Oakland County Sheriff's Office**  
**General Order # 4.2**



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| <b>SUBJECT:</b> Adult Missing Person/Unidentified Person Investigation                      |  | <b>NUMBER:</b> 4.2        |
| <b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b> 4/27/2023<br><b>REVIEW DATE:</b> Annually                            | <b>MACP Standard Impact:</b> 4.5.4 and 4.5.6 |                           |
| <b>REPLACES AND RESCINDS:</b><br>P&P #68 Missing Person and P&P#153 Missing Person - Update | <b>DISTRIBUTION:</b><br>All Personnel        | <b>NUMBER OF PAGES:</b> 6 |

This order replaces and rescinds all previously issued orders, procedures, rules and regulations, notices and/or practices in conflict with this General Order.

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this order is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons over the age of 18.

**II. POLICY**

A. Many missing persons reports involve individuals who have voluntarily left home for personal reasons, while other reports are unfounded or quickly resolved. However, there are instances in which a person disappears for unexplained reasons and under circumstances where they may be considered at risk. The roles of the complaint taker and initial responding deputy are critical in identifying the circumstances surrounding missing persons and in identifying those persons at risk. Therefore, it is the policy of Oakland County Sheriff's Office that:

1. All reports of missing persons be given full consideration and attention by members of the Sheriff's Office to include careful recording and investigation of factual circumstances surrounding the disappearance in accordance with this general order.
2. That utmost care be exercised in instances involving missing young adults aged 18-20 and those who may be mentally or physically impaired.

**III. DEFINITIONS**

A. Critical Missing Person - An individual whose whereabouts are unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded by knowledgeable parties as highly unusual or suspicious in consideration of the subject's behavior patterns, plans or routines **and** who, among other possible circumstances: **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 i)**

1. May be the subject of a crime;
2. Because of age (young or old), may be unable to properly safeguard or care for himself/herself;

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3. Suffers from diminished mental capacity or medical conditions that are potentially life-threatening if left untreated or unattended;
4. Is a patient of a medical or psychiatric institution and is considered potentially dangerous to himself or to others;
5. Has demonstrated the potential for suicide; or
6. May have been involved in a boating, swimming or other sporting accident or natural disaster.

**IV. PROCEDURES**

**A. Reporting/Classification of Missing Persons**

1. A person may be declared "missing" when his/her whereabouts are unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded by knowledgeable parties as highly unusual or suspicious in consideration of the subject's behavior patterns, plans or routines and the person is a resident of Oakland County.
  - a. A person who was last seen in Oakland County but is a resident of another community should be reported to law enforcement in their community of residence unless there are indications of criminality at an Oakland County location.
2. There is no waiting period for reporting a missing person. Missing persons reports shall be taken in person in accordance with the criteria of this General Order and the criticality of the incident. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 a)**
3. Reports of juveniles who have voluntarily left home (i.e., "runaways") should be handled pursuant to the "Investigation of Missing Children" General Order.
4. Upon any report of a missing person, the shift supervisor shall be notified.
5. Based on the outcome of initial inquiries, a decision may be made by the supervisor concerning the potential danger posed to the missing person to increase the urgency of police response and to request additional resources, including: **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 b)**
  - a. Requesting the on-call investigator
  - b. Mutual aid of other surrounding agencies
  - c. Activating Search and Rescue response

**B. Responsibilities of the First Responding Deputy**

1. The first responding deputy shall gather as much pertinent information as possible in order to properly classify a missing persons report and initiate proper response. This will include the following information: **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 d)**
  - a. Name, age and physical description of the missing person **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 c)**
  - b. Relationship of the reporting party to the missing person.
  - c. Time and place of last known location of missing person.
  - d. Missing person's last known cell phone number.
  - e. Identity of anyone accompanying the missing person.
  - f. The extent of any search for the missing person.

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- g. Whether the missing person has been missing on prior occasions and the degree to which the absence departs from their established behavioral patterns, habits or plans.
- h. Whether the missing person has been involved recently in domestic disputes, has suffered emotional trauma or life crises or demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior.
- i. Whether the individual is dependent on drugs or alcohol or has a history of mental illness.
- j. The current physical condition of the subject and whether the person is currently on prescription medication or has a medical condition requiring constant care.

**C. Preliminary Investigation (MACP Standard 4.5.4 d)**

- 1. The preliminary investigation is intended to gather additional information and to take those steps that will aid in the search for and location of a missing person. This includes gathering the following types of information and materials:
  - a. Complete description of the missing person and a recent photograph. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 c)**
  - b. Details of any physical or emotional problems identified in this General Order.
  - c. Identity of the last person(s) to have seen the missing person as well as friends, relatives, coworkers or associates who were or may have been in contact with the subject prior to disappearance.
  - d. Plans, habits, routines and personal interests of the missing person, including places frequented or locations of particular personal significance. This includes the person's vehicle or other regular means of transportation.
  - e. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables.
  - f. Any suggestions of foul play or accident.
- 2. Upon verification of a missing person, the appropriate entries shall be made without delay in state and national information databases such as LEIN, CJIS or NCIC in accordance with established procedures. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 e)**
- 3. Where possible and appropriate, search CLEMIS records for information that may facilitate the search and investigation. These include but are not limited to records that establish whether incidents have been reported in the vicinity that may have some bearing on the case, including but not limited to:
  - a. Complaints of attempted abductions, prowlers, public lewdness and suspicious persons.
  - b. Residents in the vicinity of the missing person's home or place last seen who are designated as sexual predators.
  - c. History of household abuse or domestic violence calls.
  - d. Criminal history of family members or others at the home address.
  - e. Names and addresses of any associates found in the records check shall be forwarded to the first responders, who shall question the reporting party about the associates.
  - f. Safeguard all pertinent records for future investigative reference, to include communications related to the incident, written notes, radio broadcasts, and all subsequent notifications.
- 4. Where unusual circumstances exist, issue a radio alert to all Sheriff's Office personnel.

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D. Supervisory Responsibility

1. Obtain a briefing from the first responding deputy and other Sheriff's Office personnel at the scene, sufficient to determine the scope and complexity of the case and develop an appropriate response.
2. Ensure that first responding deputy responsibilities, as outlined in the foregoing section, have been fully and properly carried out.
3. A thorough search of the missing person's residence should be conducted even if the disappearance is alleged to have occurred elsewhere. The supervisor is responsible for determining if the situation justifies a warrantless search due to exigent circumstances or the necessity for emergency aid. Whenever possible, express permission to search the residence and property should be obtained from a person having legal authority to grant permission such as a spouse, roommate or other co-occupant. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 h)**
4. Determine the necessity of a search warrant to search the missing person's residence and property. The residence shall be searched with the assistance of additional personnel and should include outbuildings, other structures, vehicles on the property and other outdoor areas on the property. The supervisor shall consider whether it is appropriate to seize any cameras or computer equipment found in the home. **(MACP Standard 4.4.4 h)**
5. Canvass the neighborhood as soon as possible to identify and interview residents and others. Identify all vehicles parked within the neighborhood and the potential locations of cameras in the vicinity. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 h)**
6. Obtain any video footage from the relevant locations that may assist in the search and investigation.
7. In all cases, but with special attention to those cases of Critical Missing Persons, determine if additional personnel and resources such as Aviation, Search and Rescue, Canine Unit or the Dive Team are needed to assist in the investigation and make the request as necessary. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 i)**
8. Notify the on-call investigator on all Critical Missing Persons cases. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 i)**
9. If necessary, establish a command post (away from the residence) to assist in field management of the search and investigation.
10. Appoint a search operations coordinator to organize search efforts. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 h)**
11. Decisions to use local media to help locate missing persons shall be made with the approval of the Sheriff, or his/her designee, and the missing person's family.
12. Appoint a media liaison deputy if the PIO is not available to deal with media inquiries and, if deemed appropriate, solicit media assistance in locating the missing person.

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13. Ensure that all required notifications have been made.
14. Establish a liaison with the family who can explain law enforcement's efforts and work with the family to uncover any information useful to the investigation.
15. If it is determined that the person is missing under suspicious or unusual circumstances, the supervisor shall request from Communications a search of the Michigan Sex Offender Registry for registered persons who live near the scene and determine whether it is appropriate to locate and interview these persons.
15. Review the completed report of the first responders and any supplemental reports before the end of the shift and require any revisions be completed before personnel leave the shift.

**E. Investigator's Responsibility**

1. Ongoing investigations of missing persons should include, but should not be limited to, the following actions and activities:
  - a. Obtaining a briefing from Sheriff's Office personnel at the scene.
  - b. Verifying the accuracy of all descriptive information concerning the missing person, being alert to facts or statements that may conflict with those obtained by the first responder or supervisor.
  - c. If circumstances dictate, establishing a method to receive tip information.
    - i. The telephone tip line can be an unused extension at the appropriate sub-station. If a tip line is established, an employee shall be assigned to answer the tip line and record all tip information. This number shall be publicized as the official tip line as separate from the regular non-emergency number for the sub-station.
    - ii. An email address to receive Internet tips. This email address can be the address of the assigned investigator, or IT can be contacted to establish an address separate from any individual's email address specifically to receive tips. The email address shall be accessible by more than one individual.
  - d. Requesting release of dental records and any fingerprints available.
  - e. Contacting hospitals and the medical examiner's office as appropriate for injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person.
  - f. Thoroughly checking the location at which the missing person was last seen and conducting interviews as appropriate with persons who were with the individual or who may work in or frequent the area.
  - g. Conducting interviews with any additional family, friends, work associates, schoolmates and teachers as well as school counselors and social case workers, as appropriate, to explore the potential for criminality or voluntary flight.
  - h. Implementing a system or other authorized means to record, cross reference and retrieve information generated through the investigation, including tip information.
  - i. The lead investigator shall maintain routine ongoing contact with the missing person's closest relative(s) concerning the progress of the investigation. These and other relevant individuals shall be informed that they must notify the lead investigator as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.
  - j. Developing an investigative plan for follow-up of all latent or unsolved investigations to include determining a frequency to re-visit the case or classify as a "cold case," determining if other records may be needed such as medical or dental and insuring the LEIN/NCIC entry is current. **(MACP Standard 4.5.4 g)**

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F. Unidentified Persons Investigations. (MACP Standard 4.5.6)

1. A deputy who responds to a report of an unidentified person, child or adult, whether living or deceased, is responsible for completion of the following tasks, among other responsibilities:
  - a. Obtaining a complete description of the individual using standardized information-gathering forms designated by the Sheriff's Office or others such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File Worksheet
  - b. Entering the subject's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File
  - c. Utilizing available resources to identify the subject, to include:
    - i. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
    - ii. State Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouses via MSP
    - iii. Oakland County Medical Examiner's Office.
  - d. Once identification has been made, cancel all notifications.

G. Public Information Officer (PIO) Responsibilities

1. In all Sheriff's Offices releases to the media, ensure that information is not released that will compromise the investigation. All media relations shall be handled pursuant to the "Media Relations" General Order whether it is handled by the Oakland County Sheriff's Office PIO, or any person assigned to that role.

H. Recovery of Missing Persons and Case Closure

1. Competent adults, having left home for personal reasons, cannot be forced to return home. Deputies locating such individuals shall:
  - a. Advise them that they are the subject of a missing persons investigation.
  - b. Ask if they desire the reporting party or next-of-kin to be notified of their whereabouts.
  - c. Make provisions to transmit this information to the reporting party or next-of-kin if permitted by the missing person.
  - d. Cancel the LEIN/NCIC entry (**MACP Standard 4.5.4 f**)
2. In all cases, reporting parties shall be informed of the well-being of located missing persons. Unless criminal matters necessitate other action, the desires of missing persons not to reveal their whereabouts shall be honored.
3. Missing persons shall be questioned to establish the circumstances surrounding their disappearance and whether criminal activity was involved.
4. Upon location of a missing person, all agencies and information systems previously contacted for assistance will be notified or updated.
5. Where indicated, follow-up action shall include filing of appropriate social service forms.
6. Where appropriate, criminal charges shall be filed with the Prosecutor's Office.



**ISSUED BY:** Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard