

**East Lansing Police Department
Policy & Procedure**

Subject: Missing Persons	ELPD Policy #:
Effective Date: March 1, 2022 Revised Date:	Distribution: Departmental
MACP Accreditation Standard : MISSING PERSON	MACP Standard: 4.5.4,4.5.5., 4.5.6.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the East Lansing Police Department to expeditiously respond to and thoroughly investigate all reports of missing persons and children. The circumstances and facts surrounding the disappearance shall be thoroughly documented in the written report. A child who is missing under “unusual circumstances” shall be considered “at risk” until sufficient information to the contrary is confirmed.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Definitions

1. **Missing Person** – A person who is (a) eighteen years of age and older and (b) whose whereabouts is unknown to his/her parents, guardian, or responsible party under circumstances that are uncustomary for the child or that would cause reasonable concern.
2. **Missing Child** – A person who is (a) younger than eighteen years of age and (b) whose whereabouts is unknown to his/her parents, guardian, or responsible party under circumstances that are uncustomary for the child or that would cause reasonable concern.
3. **Zone of Safety** – The distance a child could travel from the location where last seen before he/she would most likely be at risk of injury or exploitation based on the child’s age, developmental stage, and related matters.

B. Reporting and Classification of Missing Persons

East Lansing Police Department will accept all missing person complaints without any waiting period. Missing person reports shall be taken based upon the criticality of the incident. (4.5.4a)

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 established behavior patterns, plans or routines.
2. An individual may be considered “missing endangered” who meets the foregoing criteria and who, among other possible circumstances:
 - a. May be the subject of foul play, or
 - b. Because of age (young or old), may be unable to properly safeguard or care for themselves, or
 - c. Suffers from diminished mental capacity or medical conditions that are potentially life threatening if left untreated/unattended, or
 - d. Is a patient of a mental institution and is considered potentially dangerous to themselves or others, or
 - e. Has demonstrated the potential for suicide, or
 - f. May have been involved in a boating, swimming, other sporting accident, or a natural disaster.
3. A supervisory officer shall be immediately notified when a missing person has been classified as “missing endangered.”
4. Suzanne’s Law requires the entry of all missing persons under age 21 into LEIN/NCIC, regardless of whether the person is voluntarily or involuntarily missing. The Adam Walsh Act further requires that all missing persons under the age of 21 be entered into LEIN/NCIC within two hours of the report being taken once the agency has the minimum information required to make the entry. (4.5.4e)

C. First Responding Officer – Responsibilities(4.5.5e)

1. The originating officer must gather as much pertinent information as possible in order to properly classify a missing person report and initiate the proper response. The officer should also gather additional information and take those steps that will aid in the search for and location of the missing person.
2. The initial investigating officer should prioritize and perform as appropriate the following tasks:
 - a. Respond promptly to the scene of the report.
 - b. Interview parent(s) or person who is making the initial report.
 - c. Obtain a detailed description of the missing person. (4.5.4c)
 - d. Verify that the person is, in fact, missing. (A search of the house conducted by the officer may be appropriate.)
 - e. Identify the circumstances of the disappearance.
 - f. Provide the reporting party with the Missing Person Verification form.
 - g. Provide dispatch with information obtained for an area broadcast.
 - h. Notify a supervisor if the missing person is a child missing under unusual circumstances or could be considered "missing endangered."(4.5.5a)
3. During the initial investigation, the reporting officer should gather as much of the following information as possible:
 - a. The time and last known location of the missing person.
 - b. The identity of anyone accompanying the person and the identity of the last person(s) to have seen the missing person along with friends, relatives, coworkers, or associates who were or may have been in contact with them prior to their disappearance.
 - c. The extent of any search that may have already been conducted.
 - d. Prior occurrences and the degree to which the absence departs from established patterns, habits, or plans.

- e. Details about any recent involvement in domestic incidents, emotional trauma, or life crises.
- f. Information regarding dependency on drugs, alcohol, or any history of mental illness.
- g. Current physical condition and whether the person is on a prescription medication.
- h. Plans, routines, and personal interests of the person and places frequented. (4.5.4d)
- i. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and/or valuables.
- j. Any indication of foul play or accident.
- k. Possible destinations the missing person may be going to. (4.5.4d)

D. Missing Children

1. Additional steps shall be taken if the missing person is a juvenile or special needs. These include:
 - a. Confirm the child's custody status.
 - b. Obtain permission to conduct a thorough scene search to include the child's home even if at a different location.
 - c. Remain alert to indications of behavioral problems or prior history of running away.
 - d. Determine when, where, and by whom the child was last seen.
 - e. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the child.
 - f. Remain alert to signs of an abusive home environment.
2. Unusual Circumstances: For purposes of this procedure, the term "unusual circumstances" refers to a missing child who is younger than 18 years of age, or whose disappearance involves circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to conclude

that the child would be considered at risk. Those circumstances could include the child being:

- a. Out of zone of safety for his/her age and developmental stage
 - b. Mentally incapacitated (e.g., developmentally disabled or emotionally disturbed)
 - c. Medically dependent (e.g., insulin dependent).
 - d. Drugs involved
 - e. A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation
 - f. In a life-threatening situation
 - g. Reported to the police as missing after a delay on the part of the parents, guardians, or other responsible person
 - h. Believed to be with adults or older juveniles who could endanger his/her welfare; and/or absent under circumstances inconsistent with established patterns of behavior.
3. Officers should consider safeguarding the area as a crime scene if they believe foul play may be involved.
 4. Reports of juveniles who have voluntarily left home, i.e., runaways, should be classified as such only after an appropriate investigation.
 5. In the case of a missing child, officers should be particularly alert to information that may suggest the potential for parental abduction or the possibility of a stranger abduction.

E. Supervisory Responsibilities – Missing Children or Missing Endangered (4.5.5e)

Promptly evaluate and determine the need for an “Amber Alert” Broadcast or Endangered Missing Advisory. Where a child is missing under unusual circumstances, a supervisor will ensure the following steps are taken:

1. Obtain a briefing from the initial investigating officer and other agency personnel at the scene. The briefing should be conducted away from family, friends, and/or any other individuals who may be present.

2. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation.
3. Contact the Chief of Police or his designee.
4. If necessary, establish a command post (away from the child's residence) to assist in field management of the search and investigation.
5. Organize and coordinate search efforts.
6. Ensure that all required notifications have been made.
7. Establish a liaison with the victim's family.
8. Manage media contacts.

F. Dispatch Responsibilities (4.5.5e)

1. Dispatch shall gather as much initial information possible to assist responding officers with locating the missing person.
2. If the missing person is a juvenile, dispatch shall send the next available officer to investigate as soon as possible. If no officers are available to respond, dispatch shall notify the on-duty supervisor immediately.

G. Searches

1. The shift supervisor may authorize the mobilization of on-duty personnel as necessary for an area search.
2. If greater levels of personnel/resources are required, the supervisor shall contact a command officer for authorization and direction.

H. Resources

1. Resources that should be considered when investigating a missing endangered person or children missing under unusual circumstances include but are not limited to:
 - a. Mutual aid from area departments and federal agencies.(4.5.5b)
 - b. East Lansing Fire Department can be requested to assist with lighting if necessary.

- c. Unmanned aviation vehicle.
- d. MSP Aviation Unit.
- e. Social media may be used:
 - i. With permission from the reporting party
 - ii. With approval from the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
- f. Nixel broadcasts.
- g. News media. (4.5.4h & 4.5.5d)

I. Initial Report and NCIC/LEIN Entry

1. Suzanne's Law requires the entry of all missing persons under age 21 into LEIN/NCIC regardless of whether the person is voluntarily or involuntarily missing. The Adam Walsh Act further requires that all missing persons under the age of 21 be entered into LEIN/NCIC within two hours of the report being taken once the agency has the minimum information required to make the entry.
2. Runaway or missing juvenile calls that do not meet the Amber Alert criteria are considered exigent circumstances and all actions, including entry into NCIC will be performed immediately. The initial responding officer will collect as much information as possible to pass on to department staff and area broadcast and NCIC.
3. Missing adults are entered into NCIC, without delay, by reporting officer. (4.5.4e)
4. For NCIC purposes, missing persons are divided into six categories. The reporting officer will gather support documentation where applicable.
 - a. Disability: A person of any age who is missing and under proven physical/mental disability or is senile, therefore subjecting him/herself or others to personal and immediate danger.
 - b. Endangered: A person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that his/her physical safety may be in danger.

- c. Involuntary: A person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating the disappearance may not have been voluntary, i.e., abduction or kidnapping.
 - d. Juvenile: A person under the age of 18 who is missing and does not meet any of the entry criteria set forth in a, b, c, or e.
 - e. Catastrophe Victim: A person of any age who is missing after a catastrophe.
 - f. A person over the age of 18 not meeting the criteria for entry in any other category who is missing and for whom there is reasonable concern for his/her safety.
- 5. A record for a missing person who is over the age of 18 may be entered in NCIC with signed documentation from parent, legal guardian, next of kin, physician or other source. If none is available, the signature of the officer will suffice.
 - 6. A record for a missing person under the age of 18 shall be entered immediately. A missing person report filed with an agency is sufficient documentation for entering a juvenile in NCIC.
 - 7. Catastrophe victims may be entered by any agency involved in identifying victims of a disaster. No written documentation is required.
 - 8. The NCIC Missing Person File Data Collection Entry Guide may be used for entry of missing person records in NCIC. It can be located on online.
 - 9. The initial report for all missing person complaints must be completed before the end of the reporting officer's shift without exception.

J. Investigator's Responsibilities for Missing Children and Latent investigations (4.5.5e)

Missing children, latent investigations, and cases involving unusual circumstances will be assigned to an investigator to ensure the following measures are taken:

- 1. Collection of fingerprints, if available.

2. Contact with hospitals as appropriate to locate injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person.
3. Thoroughly check the location at which the missing person was last seen and conduct interviews as appropriate with persons who were with the individual or who may work in or frequent the area.
4. Conduct interviews with any additional family, friends, work associates, schoolmates, and teachers, as well as school counselors and social caseworkers, as appropriate, to explore the potential for foul play, voluntary flight, or, in the case of juveniles, parental kidnapping, or running away.
5. Provide updated broadcasts and related information to all officers, neighboring police agencies, and, if parental or stranger-to-stranger abduction is suspected, the FBI.
6. Decisions to inform the local media to help locate missing persons require the approval of the Chief of Police (or his designee) and the missing person's family.
7. The investigating officer will maintain routine on-going contact with the complainant concerning progress of the investigation. These and other relevant individuals will be kept informed of the status of the investigation as long as doing so does not compromise the investigation.
8. In cases of suspected parental abduction, the investigator should request the school authorities to flag the student's files for police notification if another school district requests the student's files in conjunction with enrolling the child as a student in their district.
9. In cases of suspected parental abduction, the investigator should request that the child's physician and any recently used medical facilities flag the child's files for police notification if another care provider for copies of the records makes a request.

Note regarding sections 8 and 9: The school or medical personnel should be directed to comply with the request for records in the usual manner. They should also be directed to not delay the request or notify the requesting parties of the police interest in the child.

10. If applicable, have the parents or legal guardian sign the medical and dental release form

11. If the person is missing for more than 30 days, the Department must obtain dental records of the missing person to keep the LEIN entry from being purged. The records may be obtained from the reporting person or the missing person's dentist. HIPAA exception 45CFR164.512(f) allows dentists to provide dental records when needed in emergency situations. (4.5.4g & 4.5.5f).

K. Unidentified Person Investigations (4.5.6)

An officer assigned to the report of an unidentified person/child whether living or deceased, will be responsible to:

1. Immediately notify a supervisor who will, in turn, notify the investigations supervisor. All unidentified person/child complaints will be assigned to the investigations unit for an investigation.
2. Obtain a complete description. Officers may use the standardized information gathering forms such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File worksheet and data-collection guide.
3. Enter the description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File.
4. If the unidentified person/child is deceased, the investigator assigned shall work with the Medical Examiner and should consider consulting with a Forensic Anthropologist and Forensic Odontologist to ensure all pertinent and accurate information has been gathered.
5. If a child, then utilize all available resources to aid in identification of the child.
 - a. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.
 - b. Local missing and exploited children clearing house.
 - c. Local medical examiner's offices and organizations.(4.5.4b)
6. Cancel all notifications, LEIN entries, etc., after identification is confirmed.

L. AMBER Alert of Michigan

1. Verify the missing child incident.

2. Law enforcement believes a child under the age of 18 has been the victim of an abduction and is believed to be in imminent danger of great bodily injury or death.
 - a. The child is a victim of stranger or acquaintance kidnapping. Stranger kidnapping is defined as a child being taken against his/her will by a stranger. Acquaintance kidnapping is defined as a child being taken against his/her will by an acquaintance of the child or the child's family.
3. There must be a description of the missing child. There must be sufficient information available to disseminate to the general public which could assist with the safe recovery of the child and/or apprehension of the subject.
4. A description of the suspected abductor is not required to activate Amber Alert. If suspect information is requested to be broadcast, the investigating agency must have sufficient information so that broadcasting the suspect description will assist in the recovery of the missing child.
5. The child must be entered into the LEIN/NCIC system as an "Endangered Missing Person."
6. The requesting agency must provide a 24-hour telephone number to be disseminated to the public when activating the AMBER Alert.
7. Parental Abductions must meet criteria with specific threats to injure or harm the child.
8. Homicide that result in missing children will be considered for the AMBER Alert.
9. All requests for the AMBER Alert shall be entered into the Law Enforcement Portal or call the Michigan State Police Operations Center at (517) 241-8000.
10. An AMBER Alert activation must be submitted within the first three hours of the initial investigation of the missing child complaint. AMBER Alert activations will only occur beyond the initial three hours if the investigating Law Enforcement Agency has developed significant and reliable information that the missing child is still within the immediate area, or if the law enforcement has obtained eyewitness information about the missing child's location.

M. Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA)

1. The EMA is used for cases involving missing persons that DO NOT meet the AMBER Alert criteria. It can be utilized for endangered missing persons of all ages.
2. The EMA provides a platform to notify the news media in the affected geographic region(s) that there is a missing person in a dangerous situation without having to invoke the AMBER Alert through the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) or Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA), thus reserving the AMBER Alert for the highest profile and dangerous abduction cases. (4.5.5c)
3. EMA Criteria
 - a. The circumstances DO NOT meet the criteria to issue an AMBER Alert.
 - b. The person is missing under unexplained or suspicious circumstances.
 - c. The person is believed to be in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, environment, weather conditions, or is in the company of a potentially dangerous person(s) or some other factors that may expose the person to serious harm or injury.
 - d. Public information is available that could assist in the safe recovery of the person.(4.5.4i)
4. EMA Activation Requirements
 - a. There must be a valid description of the missing person.
 - b. The person has been entered into the LEIN/NCIC system as an "Endangered Missing Person."
 - c. The request for an EMA was submitted in a timely manner.
 - d. The requesting agency must provide a 24-hour telephone number.
5. Cases to Consider for an EMA
 - a. Dementia/Alzheimer's drivers.
 - b. Children with Autism that elope.

- c. Missing/Suicidal.
- d. Parental Kidnappings with endangerments.

6. EMA Activation Procedure

- a. Contact Michigan State Police Operations at (517) 241-8000 and fill out the online form at www.michigan.gov/msp. Click on the Services tab and select Alerts.
- b. The EMA is disseminated like a media release.

N. Recovery and/or Case Closure (children)

An officer assigned to the recovery or return of a missing child, including runaways, shall complete the following tasks in addition to his/her other responsibilities:

- 1. Verify the identity of the returned child.
- 2. Arrange for intervention services, if indicated, i.e., Family Independence Agency.
- 3. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications and system entries.
- 4. Describe in the incident report the child's activities while missing and the circumstances of the recovery/return.
- 5. Where the facts indicate the officer shall file an abuse or neglect report with the Family Independence Agency.4.5.4i)

O. Recovery of Missing Persons and Case Closure (Adults)

Competent adults, having left home for personal reasons, cannot be forced to return home. Officers locating such individuals shall:

- 1. Advise them that they are the subject of a missing person investigation
- 2. Ask if they desire to have the reporting party or next-of-kin to be notified of their whereabouts
- 3. Make provisions to transmit this information to the reporting party or next-of-kin if permitted by the missing person.

In all cases, the reporting person shall be informed of the well-being of the location missing person. NOTE: Unless criminal matters necessitate other action, desires of missing persons not to reveal their whereabouts shall be honored.

Any LEIN/NCIC entry shall be cancelled by the officer receiving the information of the return, etc. (4.5.4f)

IV. CANCELLATIONS

None.

Authorized by:


Kim Johnson, Chief of Police