

# TAKOMA PARK POLICE DEPARTMENT - GENERAL ORDERS



TITLE: <b>MISSING CHILDREN</b>	NUMBER: <b>803</b>
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New    X Amends    Rescinds	General Order 803, dated January 31, 2012
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**01 Purpose:** To establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing children in accordance with the provisions of The National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990 and the Annotated Code of Maryland, Family Law Article, §§ 9-401 thru 9-403.

**02 Policy:** It is the policy of this Department to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing children, including runaways, abductions, abandoned children, and unidentified children who have been located. Additionally, this Department holds that every child reported as missing will be considered at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.

**03 Definition:** A missing child is a person under the age of 18 (eighteen) who has been reported missing or a runaway by a parent, legal guardian or person who has temporary care and custody.

**04. Legal Caveats:** In accordance with § 9-402 of the Family Law Article, Maryland Code:

**A.** No member of this Department will discourage the filing of a report or the taking of any action on a report of a missing child.

**B.** There neither is, nor will there be established, a mandatory waiting period before beginning an investigation to locate a missing child.

**C.** Every person filing a report of a missing child shall be advised that they are legally required to notify this Department and the Maryland State Police upon determining the missing child has been located if it is unlikely the two agencies would be aware of the fact.

**05 Procedures:**

The National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990 mandates law enforcement's immediate response to reports of missing children and the prompt entry of descriptive information into the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File.

Any time a child has been entered into NCIC as missing, an Incident Report, a State of Maryland Missing Person Report Form, and a Missing Person File Check List (TPPD Form 300-54) will be completed and submitted.

**A.** Receipt of Missing Child Report: Communications personnel receiving the report of a missing child are responsible for:

- 1.** Determining if the circumstances of the report meet the definition of a missing child as noted in

Section 03 of this Order. By questioning the caller about the circumstances, the on-duty Communications Dispatcher can make a preliminary assessment of the level of risk to the missing child.

2. Dispatching, immediately, an officer to the scene of the report.
3. Notifying the on-duty Shift Supervisor of the report of a missing child.
4. Obtaining, if feasible, sufficient information from the complainant or reporting party to broadcast a radio message that alerts other officers about the circumstances of the child's disappearance. Information should include descriptive particulars as well as the location where last seen. The radio broadcast should contain any information known about a possible abductor with special emphasis on a description of the suspect and vehicle used as well as direction of travel. Allied agencies should be notified via phone calls and teletypes.

**B. Initial Investigation and Classification:** Upon dispatch to the scene of a missing child report, the responding officer will immediately open a missing person investigation. If any one of the following factors exist, the child will be designated "Critically Missing":

1. The missing child is under 17 years of age.
2. The child suffers from a mental and/or physical disability or illness.
3. Disappearance of the child is of a suspicious or dangerous nature.
4. The person filing the report has reason to believe that the child was abducted.
5. The missing child previously has been the subject of a child abuse report filed with the State or local law enforcement agency. As soon as practicable, a check will be made with the Child Welfare Services as well as a check of local law enforcement records.
6. The child has not been the subject of a prior missing person report. Department records, as well as records of other local law enforcement agencies and Juvenile Services, will be reviewed when making this determination. The Maryland Center for Missing Children (MC-MC) can provide that information.

\* **Note:** A non-critically missing child becomes a critically missing child at any time there is a determination or reporting that any one of the foregoing factors exists, or the missing child has not been located after 12 hours.

### C. Critically Missing Child

When a child is determined to be Critically Missing, officers will:

1. Fill out a State of Maryland Missing Person Report Form and TPPD Form 300-54, Missing Person File Check List, to consolidate all information and obtain NCIC-entry authorization. Information should be obtained that might be useful in locating the child, such as description, clothing, jewelry, acquaintances, medical/physical problems, medications, cause of absence, photo availability, monetary resources, and places he/she might frequent. The signature of the

complainant or responsible reporting adult on the Maryland Missing Person Report Form is the authorization for NCIC entry.

**2.** Notify CIS and the on-call Duty Commander and institute appropriate intensive search procedures, including the coordination of volunteer search teams, as established by Department policy and detailed in GO 608, Missing Persons, and below.

**3.** Ensure that all available information pertaining to the case is immediately entered into NCIC

**4.** Cause a METERS/NLETS teletype message to be sent to area jurisdictions and Maryland State Police Headquarters (DC, VA, MC, PG and MDMSP9500), as well as to out-of-state jurisdictions as applicable.

**5.** Fax a copy of the State of Maryland Missing Person Report Form to the Maryland Center for Missing Persons (Fax No.410-290-1831).

**6.** Contact the Department of Health & Human Services Child Welfare Services (Tel. No. 240-777-4325) to determine if the child/family has a history of abuse and/or neglect. Obtain from Child Welfare Services any information that may assist in locating the child.

**7.** Notify the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at Charles B. Wang International Children's Building, 699 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3175, telephone 703-224-2150, FAX 703-224-2122, 24-hour hotline 1-800-THE Lost (1-800-843-5678).

**8.** Submit a Command Summary of the case.

**9.** Upon determining the missing child is or may be the victim of child abduction, the officer shall promptly notify the on-call CIS Investigator, who will respond to the scene and assume control of the investigation unless circumstances dictate otherwise. The CIS Investigator should consider taking steps for activation of the Maryland State Police AMBER plan (Section 06 below), which will rapidly distribute alert information to the mass media that can assist in developing leads.

**10. Search Procedures:** For a child under 10 years of age, officers should thoroughly check every section of the residence or location at which the child was last seen. For those 10 years or older, the search can expand from the last-seen location more quickly.

\* The younger the child, the greater the resources from other agencies that should be sought, including the county Fire/Rescue Service.

\* The search and resources sought should be dependent upon the characteristics of the child and the incident. (For example, a search for a child missing from an area near a major park may include a request for assistance from MNCPPC Police - Montgomery County.)

\* The command post should be established at a location away from the reporting complainant.

\* Whenever possible, the reporting complainant or a parent or responsible adult will be directed to remain at the home, or location last seen, accompanied by a police officer or Department employee.

**11.** The Public Information Officer may be requested to seek news media and public assistance in locating the child.

**12.** The on-duty Patrol Operations shift supervisor will ensure the alert system of “A Child Is Missing Program” is immediately contacted at 1-888-875-2246 and provided the missing child’s description, last known whereabouts, and any other information that might facilitate locating efforts. The call, answered 24/7/365 by an Information and Mapping Technician, will cause rapid placement of phone calls with an alert message to be placed between 7:00 am and 10:30 pm (EST) to residents and businesses in the area where the child went missing. The alert message will also include a TPPD phone number for use by anyone with information relating to the missing child. The on-duty Operations shift supervisor will also ensure the initial Missing Person Report (TPPD Form #300-54) contains documentation of the date and time that “A Child Is Missing” was notified, whether or not the alert system was activated, and any results therefrom.

**13.** In accordance with § 9-402 (b)(2) of the Family Law Article, which requires law enforcement to “institute appropriate intensive search procedures, including the coordination of volunteer search teams,” within 12 hours of the filing of a report of a critically missing child, the on-duty Operations shift supervisor will ensure contact is made with the Maryland State Police desk trooper in Pikesville and he/she is requested to have a NCMEC representative contact the investigating TPPD officer to coordinate civilian search team efforts. The Operations shift supervisor will further ensure the contact with the MSP desk trooper and any follow-on contact with a NCMEC representative is documented in the incident report.

**D. Non-Critically Missing Child:**

**1.** Officers will immediately seek to determine circumstances surrounding the child’s disappearance, including but not limited to:

- \* Locating the scene where the child was last observed; \* Interviewing family members, friends, teachers or other sources of information; and
- \* Obtaining information and signature on a State of Maryland Missing Person Report Form to enable NCIC entry.

**2.** Officer(s) will physically check the location where the child was last seen, to confirm the child’s absence therefrom.; ensure the locations identified as likely places for the child to be within the city or in close proximity are checked; and share information with persons contacted regarding the child’s disappearance and request a call if any new information is developed.

**3.** Ensure that a description of the missing child is broadcast to local area law enforcement agencies.

**4.** After initial searches of the location last seen and possible likely places, information will be entered into NCIC without unnecessary delay.

**5.** A copy of the report will be left with the oncoming shift supervisor. If the juvenile has not been located by the end of the responding officer’s shift, the officer will submit a Command Summary and notify the on-call CIS investigator of the child’s status and all available information, specifying when the 12-hour deadline for transfer to “Critically Missing Child” status will occur.

**E. Investigative Follow-up**

1. CID will provide for follow-up contact with the complainant no later than 12 hours after the initial report was filed. If the missing child has not been located after 12 hours, procedures under “Critically Missing Child” will be implemented.
2. The investigator assigned by the Criminal Investigation Division Commander, or the on-call investigator, will undertake a re-verification of information entered into NCIC and contained in MILES and/or NLETS messages and other lookout distributions.
3. The investigator will coordinate any need for additional resources with the duty commander.
4. The officers will re-check probable locations, schools, and known associates of the missing child.
5. The investigator assigned primary responsibility will be responsible for follow-up reports, with supplements provided by other officers. The assigned investigator will contact the complainant daily during the initial stage of the absence.
6. Additional steps will be taken as suggested by the character of the juvenile, the information and nature of the incident.

Note: For a condensed version of the foregoing procedures, refer to TPPD Form 300-54a, Missing Person Investigative Checklist.

**06 Assistance by the Maryland State Police:**

- A.** The Maryland State Police (MSP) is required to enter an investigation whenever a missing child has not been located within 24 hours of the filing of a missing persons report and either the MSP or the local investigating agency have reason to believe the missing child may be located in another jurisdiction than where the missing persons report was filed.
- B.** Upon request from other law enforcement agencies, the Maryland State Police will assist with missing children investigations. Such assistance may be requested at the direction of Command Authority. Among resources available for AMBER or other investigations are: (1) investigators; (2) computer forensic assistance; (3) technical surveillance; (4) a phone bank for investigative leads; (5) lead management system; and (6) AMBER plan.
- C.** The **AMBER** Plan will be activated by and in consultation with the MSP to present the widest possible media broadcast of lookouts in a serious child abduction. This tool can be effective but generates the need for a high level of police resources and shall only be used when convincing evidence indicates a child has been abducted and is in danger, and that the child and/or abductor is still in the area.
  1. The following four factors must be met:
    - a. The officer has confirmed an abduction of a child 17 years of age or younger; and

- b.** The officer has reason to believe the abduction's circumstances indicate the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death; and
- c.** An adequate description has been provided of the child and either the abductor or the suspect vehicle, and the descriptions are sufficient to cause a belief that an immediate broadcast will assist observers in identifying those parties and in contacting law enforcement; and
- d.** The child's information already has been, or immediately will be, entered into NCIC

**2.** In a parental or family abduction, the officer should be able to articulate a reasonable belief that the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death. Familial abduction does not prohibit the use of AMBER Alert; consideration should be given to the mental and physical state of the abductor and statements or threats he/she has made. A history of domestic violence may be considered but a criminal history, by itself, may not be sufficient.

**3.** The on-call/assigned investigator will review the original officer's information and determine whether the incident meets the AMBER Alert requirements. The investigator will notify the on-call Duty Commander of his/her intent to request an AMBER Alert by the MSP.

**a.** The investigator will contact the MSP duty officer at MSP State Headquarters, who will notify the MSP AMBER Coordinator. The investigator should be prepared to provide MSP with an investigator's telephone contact that will be immediately accessible for callback, as well as the telephone numbers for the public to call with investigative leads and for the media to call for information.

**b.** After verifying compliance with criteria and confirming lookout details with the TPPD investigator, the AMBER Coordinator will contact the broadcast media outlets, the Maryland Department of Transportation, and surrounding states.

**c.** The on-call Duty Commander will cause notification of the Chief and Public Information Officer.

**4.** Media broadcast outlets, alerted by MSP, will direct informants to contact this Department (the investigative leads telephone number) and/or 9-1-1. Media announcements will be broadcast every 20 minutes for the first two hours, with highway information and web alerts continuing for 24 hours.

**5.** This Department will be responsible for the investigation and for any requests for media interviews and information. As soon as possible, information regarding the lookout for the suspect or suspect vehicle and missing child will be provided to Communications Dispatch and the Public Information Officer.

**6.** Upon recovery of a missing child who is the subject of an AMBER Alert, the investigator will cause notification of the MSP Duty Officer at MSP Headquarters, who will alert the media of the recovery and to discontinue the alerts.

**07 Extended Missing Children Investigations:**

**A.** If a child has been missing for more than 30 days, the Commander of Criminal Investigations Division will ensure that an NCIC Missing Person packet is completed and a copy is maintained in the original case file. The NCIC Missing Person packet and report will be forwarded to MC-MC, no later than 10 days after the 30-day time limit is reached.

**B.** CIS will also ensure that all additional information is entered into MILES/NCIC, including dental records. MC-MC can assist in locating dental professionals who can provide assistance with forensic dental records.

**D.** CID will ensure the complainant is contacted weekly after the initial stages of the investigation and periodically thereafter.

**08 Recovery of Child and Follow-up:**

**A.** Whenever a missing child has been located, Communications will dispatch an officer to:

**1.** Confirm recovery/return and the circumstances thereof, i.e., when and where located, condition of the child, reason for disappearance, person(s) involved in the disappearance, and the nature of closure code to clear the missing person record.

**2.** Immediately have the missing person removed/cleared from METERS/NCIC.

**3.** Complete a supplement under the original case number, a copy of which will be provided to the assigned CIS investigator.

**4.** In all cases of recovery/return, the dispatched patrol officer or CIS investigator (whichever is handling the investigation) will promptly email notification to the Public Information Officer who will, in turn, cancel local public alerts/lookouts. Note: If recovery/return is handled by patrol, notification will also be made to assigned or on-call CIS investigator.

**B.** If deemed necessary, the assigned investigator thereafter will conduct an in-depth interview of the child and complainant to further ascertain circumstances surrounding the disappearance and the recovery/return of the child.

## **09 Chronically Missing/ Runaway Children**

Whenever a child or juvenile has been reported missing or a runaway more than three times in a six-month period, the youth can be considered as a chronically missing/runaway.

**A.** All procedures for a chronically missing/runaway child will be followed as above for a non-critically missing child if 17 years or older or for a critically missing child if under 17 years of age.

**B.** Upon recovery of the youth, the officer/investigator will consider placing charges for “child in need of supervision” or “juvenile out of control” to initiate referral to Juvenile Justice. If charges are not placed, the officer should be able to articulate a rationale for not doing so and include information on referrals to optional services in the follow-up report.