



# DESCHUTES COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Policy Title: <b>Missing Persons Investigation</b>	Effective Date: June 29, 2016	Policy Number: <b>7.06</b>
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Attachments:	L. Shane Nelson, Sheriff	

## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish responsibilities and guidelines for the investigation of missing persons, including missing vulnerable adults.

## II. POLICY

Many missing person reports, including juvenile runaways and vulnerable adults, involve individuals who have voluntarily left home for personal reasons, while other reports are often unfounded or quickly resolved. However, there are many instances in which persons disappear 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. It is the policy of the Sheriff's Office that:

1. All reports of missing persons, including runaways and vulnerable adults, are given full consideration and attention by members of this agency, including careful recording and investigation of factual circumstances surrounding the disappearance in accordance with this policy.
2. Particular care must be exercised in instances involving missing children, vulnerable adults, those who may be mentally or physical impaired, or others who are insufficiently prepared to take care of themselves.

## III. DEFINITIONS

*Missing* is declared when a person's 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.

*Missing Critical* means an individual who meets the following criteria and who, among other possible circumstances:

- a. may be the subject of foul play;
- b. because of age (young or old), may be unable to properly safeguard or care for themselves;
- c. suffers from diminished mental capacity or medical conditions that are potentially life threatening if left untreated/unattended;
- d. individuals with cognitive impairment, including but not limited to, dementia, alzheimer's, intellectual and developmental disabilities and brain injuries;

- e. is a patient of a mental institution and is considered potentially dangerous to themselves or others;
- f. has demonstrated the potential for suicide; or
- g. may have been involved in a boating, swimming or other sporting accident or natural disaster.

*Vulnerable Adult* is, but not limited to, a missing adult who has: an impaired mental condition, such as dementia, Alzheimer's, an intellectual or developmental disability, or a brain injury. Missing vulnerable adults shall be considered "missing critical."

## IV. PROCEDURES

### A. Reporting/Classification of Missing Persons

1. There is no waiting period for reporting a missing person. Missing person reports shall be taken in person, not over the telephone, unless the reporting party is inaccessible.
2. Reports of juveniles who have voluntarily left home (i.e., "runaways") should be classified as such only after thorough investigation.
3. Based on the outcome of initial inquiries, a decision may be made concerning the potential danger posed to the missing person and the urgency of law enforcement response.
4. In the case of individuals designated as missing critical, the deputy and/or supervisor shall consider utilizing local and social media to alert the community of the missing vulnerable person.

### B. Initial Report Taking

**A Missing Persons checklist has been developed to assist and should be used by the initial investigator. In the case of a juvenile, a Missing Person/Runaway Form must be completed and faxed to the Juvenile Department. Copies of the checklist and form are available in the form files.**

1. The deputy must either take or receive a written statement from the parent, legal guardian, next of kin, physician or other competent source (friend, neighbor, caregiver) stating under what circumstances the person is missing.
2. The initial report taker must gather as much relevant information as possible to properly classify a missing person report and initiate the proper response. This includes the following information:
  - a. Name, age and physical description of the subject and relationship of the reporting party to the missing person;
  - b. Time and place of last known location and the identity of anyone accompanying the subject;
  - c. The extent of any search for the subject;
  - d. Whether the subject has been missing on prior occasions and the degree to which the absence departs from established behavior patterns, habits or plans;
  - e. Whether the individual has been involved recently in domestic incidents; suffered emotional trauma or life crises; demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic or bizarre behavior; is dependent on drugs or alcohol or has a history of mental illness; and
  - f. The current physical condition of the subject and whether the person is currently on prescription medication.

**If the missing person meets the criteria for Amber Alert (see policy [5.28 Amber Alert](#)) initiate the appropriate system.**

3. A shift supervisor and a detective supervisor shall be notified immediately upon classification of a report as "missing-critical."
4. The Detective Division should be notified in the event of all missing person reports and routed a copy of all such reports.

### **C. Preliminary Investigation**

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. (Refer to the Missing Persons checklist for guidance.) This includes gathering the following types of information and materials:

1. The deputy shall obtain a DNA sample from the victim (i.e., hair brush, tooth brush, soiled hat, soiled sock, hat, etc.). If a DNA sample is not available, a "Family Reference Kit" (available in patrol supply cabinet and in the Detective Division) shall be utilized.
2. The deputy shall obtain medical and dental records of the missing person. These records shall be entered into LEDS/NCIC as soon as possible, but no longer than 60 days after initial entry. If records are not entered within 60 days after initial entry, a supplemental report shall be written with an explanation of the reason.
3. Complete description of the subject and a recent photograph.
4. Details of any physical or emotional problems identified in items B (1) (e) and (f) of this policy.
5. Identity of the last person(s) to have seen the subject as well as friends, relatives, coworkers or associates who were, or may have been, in contact with the subject prior to disappearance.
6. Plans, habits, routines and personal interests of the subject including places frequented or locations of particular personal significance.
7. Indications of missing personal belongings, particularly money and other valuables.
8. Any suggestions of foul play or accident.
9. In the case of missing children, deputies should involve a detective immediately.
10. Upon verification of a missing person, a missing person report shall be completed and appropriate entries made in state and national information databases in accordance with established procedures (e.g., LEDS, NCIC and The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children). Missing persons shall be entered as soon as possible but in all cases missing persons must be entered in LEDS/NCIC within twelve (12) hours of receiving the report. The Missing Children's Clearinghouse (MCCH) shall be notified in cases involving Custodial Interference I or II or Kidnapping I or II.
11. In the case of persons designated as "missing critical," a shift supervisor may:
  - a. direct 9-1-1 Dispatch broadcast to all persons on duty and to local agencies all information necessary to identify the missing person, and any information/description of a vehicle, if applicable; and
  - b. request that the watch commander authorize mobilization of resources necessary for an area search.

### **D. Ongoing Investigation**

Ongoing investigations of missing persons should include, but should not be limited to, the following actions and activities:

1. Request release of dental records, check for available fingerprints and obtain subpoenas for financial records.
2. Contact hospitals for injured or deceased persons fitting the description of the missing person, and check for prior medical information. Contact the State Medical Examiner's Office, as appropriate, for information on deceased person(s) matching the description of the missing person.
3. Thoroughly check the location at which the missing person was last seen and interview persons who were with the individual or who may work in or frequent the area.
4. Interview additional family, friends, work associates, schoolmates, teachers, school counselors and social case workers to explore the potential for foul play, voluntary flight, or, in the case of juveniles, parental kidnapping or running away.

5. Provide identification and related information to appropriate divisions of the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office, the State Police missing persons' authority, neighboring police agencies and, if parental or stranger-to-stranger abduction is suspected, the FBI.
6. Decisions to use local media to help locate missing persons shall be made with the approval of the Sheriff, or his designee, and the missing person's family.
7. The lead investigator shall maintain routine, ongoing contact with the missing person's closest relative and/or reporting party concerning progress of the investigation. These and other appropriate individuals shall be informed that they must notify the lead investigator as soon as any contact is made with the missing person.
8. When a person who has been entered as a Runaway reaches the age of 18, the investigating deputy will contact records personnel to ensure LEDS automatically changed the entries to a Missing Person.

#### **E. Recovery of Missing Persons and Case Closure**

1. Before a missing person case can be cleared, law enforcement must see the individual in person.
2. 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 person investigation;
  - b. ask if they desire the reporting party or next-of-kin to be notified of their whereabouts; and
  - c. make provisions to transmit this information to the reporting party or next-of-kin if permitted by the missing person.
3. In all cases, reporting parties shall be informed of the well-being of located missing persons. Unless criminal matters necessitate other action, desires of missing persons not to reveal their whereabouts shall be honored.
4. Upon locating a missing person, the investigating deputy shall ensure that the entries in state and national information databases (e.g., LEDS, NCIC, The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and MCCH).
5. Missing persons shall be questioned to establish the circumstances surrounding their disappearance and whether criminal activity was involved.
6. Where indicated, criminal charges shall be filed with the District Attorney's Office.

### **V. TRAINING REGARDING MISSING VULNERABLE ADULTS**

All personnel who have responsibility for initial or follow-up investigations of missing vulnerable adults will receive training that includes interacting with individuals with intellectual or developmental disability, or an impaired mental condition such as dementia, Alzheimer's or brain injury. The agency will ensure that all members of this department who have responsibility for initial or follow-up investigation of missing vulnerable adults receive training that includes:

- Assessments and interviews
- Use of resources to assist
- Evaluating the need for a heightened response
- Verifying the accuracy of all descriptive information
- Initiating a neighborhood search

- Managing a missing person's case
- Key investigative and coordination steps
- Preserving scenes
- Interacting with individuals with cognitive impairment, including dementia, Alzheimer's, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and brain injuries