WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT

Subject: Missing Persons		Policy # 4.3.1
Accreditation 4.3.1		
Effective Date: April 4, 2008	Revised Date: December 30, 2015	
By Authority Of: Chief Michael A. Kelly	Signature: Michael A. Kelly	

4.3.1 MISSING PERSONS

A. When an officer receives a missing persons report they shall immediately respond to the scene and take all pertinent information on the subject and the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. The information shall be put on the West Norriton Township Police Department incident reporting system. If the missing person is between the ages of 18 and 20 years inclusive an investigation shall be commenced immediately and the person shall be entered into N.C.I.C. The investigating officer shall also fill out a Missing Persons Declaration form to determine if the person is an adult, 18 years of age or older, and falls under one of the four categories in the law. If the adult missing person does not fall under one of the four categories they may not be entered into N.C.I.C. or C.L.E.A.N. as a missing person. The four categories are:

1. Disability - A person who is missing and who is under physical/mental disability, thereby subjecting himself/herself or others to personal and immediate danger.

2. Involuntary - A person who is missing under circumstances indicating that the disappearance was not voluntary.

3. Endangered - A person who is missing under circumstances indicating that his/her physical safety is in danger.

4. Catastrophe - A person is missing after a catastrophe (e.g. plane crash)

B. When it is established that it is a legitimate missing person the officer shall enter all the information into a missing persons report in the National Crime Information Center (N.C.I.C.) and the Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (C.L.E.A.N.) through the Montgomery County Communications Center.

C. When possible, the investigating officer shall check all known places that the person might be within the Township and request the appropriate jurisdiction to check other known places outside the Township.

D. Missing Juveniles

1. Definitions

a. The term **missing juvenile** refers to a person who is;

i. Younger that 18 years of age and,
ii. Whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent, guardian, or responsible party.

b. Officers should be aware that they may encounter several types of missing juvenile cases. They are defined as follows:

i. The **non-family abduction** in which a juvenile is taken by an unknown individual, through force, or persuasion, usually in furtherance of additional victimization.
ii. The **family abduction** in which a non-custodial family member flees with the juvenile, usually in direct violation of a court ordered custody arrangement.
iii. The **runaway** juvenile, most often a teenager, who leaves voluntarily for a variety of reasons
iv. The **lost or otherwise missing** juvenile, who becomes separated from parents or caretakers under circumstances not indicating the likelihood of an abduction or voluntary absence.
v. The **thrown-away** juvenile whose caretaker makes no effort to recover the juvenile who has run away or who has been abducted or deserted. While not necessarily reported to authorities as missing, juveniles in this category frequently require the services of law enforcement.

c. While all missing juvenile incidents should be investigated immediately and thoroughly, those involving unusual circumstances indicate a heightened likelihood of risk to the juvenile and therefore, require an intensive response. The term **unusual circumstances** refer to a missing juvenile who is;

i. Under the age of 18 years
ii. Believed to be one or more of the items noted below:

(a) Out of the safety zone for his or her age, developmental stage, and/or physical condition
(b) Mentally diminished
(c) Drug dependent, including both prescription and illicit substances
(d) A potential victim of foul play or sexual exploitation
(e) In a life threatening situation
(f) Believed to be with others who could endanger his or her welfare
(g) Is absent under circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the juvenile should be considered a risk.

iii. Whose disappearance involves circumstances that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the juvenile should be considered a risk.

2. Questions concerning parental custody occasionally arise in relation to missing juvenile reports. It shall be the policy of the West Norriton Township Police Department to accept the report of a missing juvenile even if custody has not been formally established. Reporting parties shall be encouraged to obtain legal custody as soon as possible; however, since safety of the missing juvenile(s) is paramount, members of this police department shall open a case when it can be shown that the child has been removed, without explanation, from his or her usual place of residence.

    a. If custody can be established through court documents, the officer shall obtain a copy of the court document and as soon as practical establish with the issuing court that the court document is valid.

3. The investigating officer assigned to the report of a missing juvenile shall;

    a. Respond promptly to the scene of the report
    b. Interview the parent(s) or person who made the initial report
    c. Obtain a description of the missing juvenile including photograph(s) and video tapes or compact discs. Gather all other pertinent information.
    d. Verify that the juvenile is in fact missing. The officer shall cause a through search of the juvenile's home and all out buildings within the boundaries of the property to make sure the juvenile is not within these areas. If, in the opinion of the investigating officer and the shift supervisor a search of the area around the residence is warranted, assistance from other agencies, the local fire department and/or ambulance squads may be called for. Note: A search of the home should be conducted even if the juvenile was last seen elsewhere.
    e. Confirm the juvenile's status. Custodial issues could play a role in the disappearance.
    f. Identify the circumstances of the disappearance. Does an unusual circumstance exist?
    g. Determine when and where the missing juvenile was last seen.
    h. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the missing juvenile.
    i. Identify the missing juvenile's zone of safety for his or her age, developmental stage and physical and mental state.
    j. Obtain a description of the suspected abductor(s) and other pertinent information.
    k. Provide detailed descriptive information to Montgomery County Emergency Dispatch Services for broadcast and to other responding law enforcement agencies.
    l. Identify and interview everyone at the scene.
    m. Secure and safeguard the crime scene.
    n. Record if the missing juvenile has access to an on-line computer, cellular telephone, and/or pager.
    o. Prepare necessary reports and completing appropriate forms
    p. Brief the shift supervisor or OIC of the situation to make a determination if additional resources are needed.

4. When the person reported missing is under the age of 18 years the officer shall immediately conduct an investigation regardless of the age of the child and the circumstances of the missing child

5. When the missing person is under the age of 18 years the officer shall attempt to determine if the child is missing as a result of a child custody dispute. If this is the case the investigating officer shall notify the appropriate police agency where the suspected child abductor resides to try to determine if the child is there. The officer shall obtain a full and complete description of the child to include last known clothing and physical description and all pertinent information surrounding the disappearance of the child. An immediate entry shall be made of the child into N.C.I.C. and C.L.E.A.N.

6. The responding officer shall make an entry into the Unidentified Persons File through C.L.E.A.N. immediately upon:

   a. taking custody of an unidentified living child, such as an infant, or
   b. a physically or mentally disabled child, or discovering an unidentified deceased child

7. Upon the discovery of an unidentified deceased child the pertinent information shall be entered into the CLEAN Unidentified Persons File by the responding officer.

8. In all cases where the missing person is a child under the age of 18 years, in accordance with Act 106 of 1990, specifically section 402-A, the investigating officer shall notify the school district where the child last attended and the Pa. Department of Health, Division of Vital Records of the missing child so they may make a record of it in case somebody asked for the child's school records or birth certificate.

9. When taking the missing persons report for a juvenile make sure that all information is taken especially the D.O.B. and Place of Birth. If the child was born outside of the Pa. then the Department of Health need not be notified. The school district must be notified in all cases.

10. Notification of both the Department of Health and the school district must be made on the appropriate forms and faxed to the following numbers:

Division of Vital Statistics	Norristown School District
FAX (724) 656-3079	FAX (610) 630-5137

11. When the juvenile is found and returned home the Department of Health and the school district shall again be notified of the return of child so they may clear the alerts from their records.

12. When searching for a missing juvenile the investigating officer shall cause a search of the juvenile's house and all out buildings within the curtilage of the property to make sure that the child is not within these areas.

E. If, in the opinion of the investigating officer and the Shift Supervisor, a search of the area around the residence is warranted assistance from the local fire departments and/or ambulance squads may be called for.

F. Once the missing person has been located it is the responsibility of the officer receiving the information to ensure that they cancel the missing persons message that was put into N.C.I.C. and C.L.E.A.N in a timely manner.

G. **AMBER ALERT** – is a statewide program designed to put out an alert for missing child statewide should the circumstances of the disappearance meet the established criteria.

1. The criteria needed to activate the AMBER ALERT system are as follows:

   a. the child must be under the age of 16, or under the age of 18 and have a proven mental or physical disability; and
   b. the police must believe the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.

   NOTE: Family Abductions are **NOT** excluded, provided the above criteria are met and the circumstances support activating the Pa. Amber Alert Plan.

2. Once the above criteria are met the incident information is called into the PSP Consolidated Dispatch Center in Harrisburg at **717-346-5430** County Radio. The investigating officer may also call in to make sure the information was delivered. Tell the Dispatcher that you are requesting an Amber Alert.

   NOTE: This information can be sent on a CLEAN Message to PSP but it should be followed up with a phone call this number.

3. Once the criteria have been approved the system will be activated by PSP.

H. DNA

1. The West Norriton Township Police Department shall ensure that any of the missing child's DNA is delivered to the Pennsylvania State Police in accordance with 44 Pa. C.S. 2316.2 for submission to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System.

2. The West Norriton Township Police Department shall ensure that DNA samples from the unidentified deceased child shall be collected and submitted to the Pennsylvania State Police in accordance with Pa. C.S 2316.4 for law enforcement identification purposes.