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1 Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Sheriff's Office to promptly obtain relevant details from any person who is attempting to report someone missing regardless of jurisdiction and take action according to this policy.

1.1 Directives Affected

Location	Policy	Section	Status
BLEIS Operations	P-018-R1 P-021-R1	All	Canceled
Rules and Regulations	Chapter 36	36.3	Canceled

2 Persons Affected

- All personnel (Section 4.1)
- All law enforcement deputy sheriffs
- Records personnel

3 Definitions

Child (or juvenile or youth) - Any unemancipated individual who is under the chronological age of eighteen years ([RCW 13.32A.030\(4\)](#)).

Missing Person – Any person who meets the criteria for entry into A Central Computerized Enforcement Service System (ACCESS) as a missing person (Section 6).

Parent – includes custodian or guardian ([RCW 13.32A.030\(14\)](#)).

4 Missing Persons Reports and Investigation

4.1 Report Acceptance

Sheriff's Office personnel should immediately refer all persons who are attempting to report someone as missing to a law enforcement deputy sheriff.

Law enforcement deputy sheriffs shall promptly obtain from the reporting party all information necessary to determine if the person about whom the report is being made qualifies as a [missing person](#). If the individual qualifies as a missing person, the deputy will take action in accordance with Section 4.2.

Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent or discourage deputies from assisting reporting parties who have information about persons whose locations are unknown but who do not meet the technical requirements for entry into ACCESS. However, deputies should be careful not to reveal to others the location of persons who are entitled to privacy.

4.2 Initial Actions

Initial actions taken by law enforcement deputies who receive missing person reports should include the following:

- (a) Taking or initiating reasonable steps to locate the missing person.
- (b) Requesting "watch for" radio broadcasts be made without delay to agencies in Whatcom County when doing so may help locate a person who has recently gone missing.
- (c) Taking custody of missing juveniles who are located in accordance with the Child Protective Custody and Placement policy.
- (d) Gathering detailed information about the missing person, normally documented on the [Missing Persons Form](#). Signatures of reporting parties on this form also serve to authorize ACCESS entries when required by Section 6.2.1.
- (e) Requesting that a timely missing persons entry be made in ACCESS in accordance with Section 6.2.2.
- (f) Obtaining written authorization from the missing person's next of kin to obtain the person's medical and dental records, normally done on a [Medical Release Form](#).
- (g) Informing parents of missing children about services provided by the Washington State Patrol's (WSP) Missing and Unidentified Person's Unit (MUPU) (see Section 7.2).
- (h) Determining if the missing person case should be forwarded to another agency after the initial report is taken, using Section 5 as a guide.
- (i) Documenting actions taken in a written report.

4.3 Written Report Routing

All reports regarding missing persons should be routed to the Detective Sergeant.

4.4 Missing Person Confirmation

One-time requests from other agencies to confirm the status of a WCSO missing person (e.g. when the requesting agency has located the missing person) should be forwarded to the patrol shift supervisor. The supervisor will verify the status of the missing person by checking applicable written reports. This should not be confused with administrative verification requests covered by Section 4.5.4.

4.5 Long-Term Case Management

If initial efforts to locate a missing person are unsuccessful, deputies should refer missing persons cases to the Detective Division. The Detective Sergeant shall ensure that any such cases received by the Detective Division are managed in order to meet the requirements in this section.

4.5.1 Missing Over 30 Days or Criminal Activity Suspected

When a missing person has not been found within 30 days of the report or at any time when foul play is suspected, the handling detective shall contact the county medical examiner to determine if that office has any information concerning the missing person. If after conferring with the medical examiner the person is still determined to be missing, the handling detective shall complete the following ([RCW 68.50.320](#)):

- (a) File a report with the WSP's MUPU, including a photo of the missing person if one is available.
- (b) Initiate the collection of DNA belonging to missing persons when available and from their family members for nuclear and mitochondrial DNA testing along with the necessary consent forms. DNA samples shall be submitted for processing to the Washington State Patrol's [Forensic Laboratory Services](#) or other appropriate lab as soon as possible ([RCW 43.43.751](#)).
- (c) Obtain original or diagnostic-quality copies of the missing person's dental records and submit them to the WSP's MUPU.

4.5.2 School Notification

The handling detective should ask any school in which a missing child is enrolled to flag the child's record to immediately notify law enforcement of any inquiries about or requests for the child's school records.

4.5.3 Contacting the Reporting Party

In all missing person cases, the assigned detective should attempt contact with the reporting party no less than every three months in order to verify the status of the reported missing person. After twelve months, contacts with the reporting party should be attempted yearly. All verifications should be reported to the WSP via ACCESS.

4.5.4 Missing Person Verification

Any periodic administrative requests from the WSP or other agency to verify the status of all or select WCSO missing persons should be forwarded to the Detective Sergeant.

4.6 Case Conclusion

Missing persons investigations may be concluded when:

- The missing person is located, or
- Another agency accepts the case and formally assumes the investigative responsibilities.

In addition to ensuring ACCESS messages required by Section 6.3 are sent, the deputy receiving the location information should notify the Detective Sergeant so that any assigned detective can report the location to the WSP's MUPU, if applicable. This may be accomplished via a notation in the follow-up report the deputy should file.

5 Jurisdictional Guidelines

The following table indicates how jurisdictional issues regarding missing persons cases should normally be handled. The agency having jurisdiction over the missing person’s residence should normally handle the case after the initial actions are taken. However, deputies may continue to assist with any investigation on a person last seen in Whatcom County. Nothing in this guide should be construed to relieve Sheriff’s Office personnel of their responsibility to accept and act on initial missing persons reports as described in Section 4.

		Missing person last seen	
		In WCSO jurisdiction	Outside WCSO jurisdiction
Location of missing person’s residence	In WCSO jurisdiction	Case handled by WCSO.	These cases are usually received from an outside jurisdiction. WCSO will normally take over case management.
	Outside WCSO jurisdiction	Initial investigation and reporting (including ACCESS entry) handled by WCSO. Normally referred to the agency where the person’s residence is located at a later time by Detective Division. Deputies may continue to assist as needed.	Case should be immediately referred to jurisdiction where person was last seen. Deputies may assist as needed.

5.1 Referral to Other Agencies

Deputies should ensure that there is an affirmative transfer of primary responsibility for a missing person investigation when referring a case to another agency. If it is unclear which agency will be continuing the investigation and satisfying applicable reporting requirements, deputies should notify a supervisor.

6 ACCESS Categories and Reporting Requirements

The following table contains the categories of missing persons that can be reported to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and Washington Crime Information Center (WACIC) via A Central Computerized Enforcement Service System (ACCESS).

Category (Code)	Age	Description	Examples
Disability (EMD)	Any	Missing with proven physical or mental disability or is senile, thereby subjecting him/herself or others to <i>personal and immediate danger</i> .	Advanced dementia patient walk-away from secured mental health facility.
Endangered (EME)	Any	Missing under circumstances indicating that his or her physical safety may be in danger.	Runaway who left a note saying he/she planned to meet with a stranger. Adult who recently received credible threats of harm.
Involuntary (EMI)	Any	Missing under circumstances indicating that the disappearance may not have been voluntary.	Abduction
Juvenile (EMJ)	Under 18	Missing and does not meet any of the entry criteria for disability, endangered, involuntary, or catastrophe victim.	Runaway
Catastrophe Victim (EMV)	Any	Missing after a catastrophe.	Natural disaster
Other (EMO)	18 or older	Missing but not meeting the criteria for entry in any other category <i>and</i> for whom there is a reasonable concern for his/her safety.	Adult who has deviated significantly from normal pattern of contacting others (e.g. missed important appointment/work).

6.1 ACCESS Entry Responsibilities

Deputies shall cause the appropriate missing person entry into ACCESS to be made, normally by the following:

- WCSO Records Division – normal business hours.
- What-Comm Dispatch Center – all other times.

6.2 Missing Person Record Entry

6.2.1 Reporting Party Signatures

All reports taken for missing persons 21 years of age or older must be signed by the reporting party prior to entry into ACCESS. Reports of missing persons under 21 years of age do not require signatures.

6.2.2 Timeliness

All missing persons reports should be entered into ACCESS as soon as possible ([RCW 36.28A.120](#)). Missing persons younger than 21 years of age must be entered no later than **two hours** after the report is first received by What-Comm or a Sheriff's Office employee (42 USC [5779](#), [5780](#)).

6.3 Missing Person Record Removal

When a missing person is located (i.e. determined to no longer be missing), the deputy who receives such information shall cause the appropriate ACCESS message to be made in accordance with Section 6.1 as follows:

- WCSO missing persons – message clearing the missing person record (i.e. “Clear” message)
- Missing persons from other agencies – message informing the originating agency that the person has been located (i.e. “Locate” message)

7 Additional Resources

7.1 WSP Multiagency Task Force on Missing and Exploited Children

The Washington State Patrol Multiagency Taskforce on Missing and Exploited Children is available to assist local jurisdictions on missing cases through referrals, onsite assistance, case management, and training ([RCW 13.60.110](#)). The task force may assist agencies, upon request, by:

- (a) Direct assistance and case management.
- (b) Technical assistance.
- (c) Personnel training.
- (d) Referral for assistance from local, state, national, and international agencies.
- (e) Coordination and information sharing among local, state, interstate, and federal law enforcement and social service agencies.

7.2 WSP Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit (MUPU) assists law enforcement agencies and parents in locating missing persons.

At the request of a parent, legal custodian or guardian who has reported a child as having run away from home, WSP will make the information about the runaway child available on its website - www.wsp.wa.gov/crime/mpu.htm ([RCW 43.43.510\(2\)\(a\)](#)).

Reference

Forms

[Medical Release](#)[Missing Person](#)

Related Directives

Location	Title
WCSO Directives System	Child Protective Custody and Placement

Resources

[WSP Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit](#)

Revision History

Effective Date	Revision No.	Summary	Affected Section(s)
July 19, 2011	1.0	New	N/A

Standards

Source	Reference	Title/Subject
Federal law	42 USC 5779 , 5780	Missing child reporting requirements
Lexipol	332	Missing person reporting
State law	RCW 13.32.030 RCW 13.60 RCW 36.28A.100-120 RCW 43.43.500-530 RCW 43.43.751 RCW 68.50.320	Definitions Missing children clearinghouse Missing person system responsibilities Crime information center Biological samples Investigation procedures
WASPC	15.1.8	Missing persons, missing children