

# City of Virginia Beach Police Department

## Search & Rescue Management Field Guide



### **A Guide for Department Personnel**

- Methods for Conducting Search and Rescue Activities

*This Field Guide is Prepared and Updated by the Virginia Beach Police Department  
Special Operations,*

*Under the Approval of the Chief of Police* \_\_\_\_\_

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**Purpose (CALEA 46.2.5)**

To establish procedures and guidelines for officers and supervisors to make accurate decisions regarding the appropriate response to reports of missing children and other individuals who may be “At Risk” or have special needs, such as Alzheimer’s disease, and other medical concerns, that become missing. The typography of Virginia Beach presents inherent dangers of beaches, inlet waterways, drainage ditches and swimming pools that with each event of a missing child or wandering Alzheimer patient is of serious concern and the decisions made and actions taken during the preliminary stages could have a profound effect on the outcome of the case.

The capability to rapidly assess a situation based on the available facts and take the appropriate action is a necessity. Understanding the emotional nature of the missing child case or an individual, who wanders from Alzheimer’s disease or a lost child with special needs, requires each officer and supervisor to be able to assess the situation accurately and quickly to protect lives.

The Incident Command System will be utilized in managing the search efforts. The ICS organization has the capability to expand or contract to meet the needs of the incidents listed in this field guide. As first responders, officers may be called upon to function in an ICS environment as the Incident Commander. The Incident Commander is the person in charge of the incident. The Incident Commander is responsible for on-scene management until command authority is transferred to another person.

**Missing Children**

When the police department receives the report of a missing child, there is seldom a clear indication as to whether the child has simply wandered off, run away from home, or is the victim of abduction. While it is true that most children are either found, or return on their own within a few hours or days each officer responding to a case of a missing child should respond to the report as if the child is in immediate danger.

The lost child on the beach is a frequent occurrence in the summer time. The Second Precinct has worked with the area hotels to provide and outfit the visiting child with a wristband that has hotel information that will help to reunite the found child. Lifeguards are also a valuable resource to be called upon to assist with search efforts. Instead of both parents trying to search on the beach, suggest one parent remain as a point of contact at the site. The other parent can assist by obtaining photographs from their residence / hotel room and contacting family. It is not recommended they participate in the search effort and follow the framework for searches ([Appendix I](#)).

**Assessing Runaway-Child Cases**

One of the major obstacles officers face is determining the severity of the situation when the child leaves home voluntarily. Learning the actual circumstances why the child left home will help in prioritizing search efforts. Officers should remain alert to any unusual circumstances surrounding the child’s disappearance that would require immediate action and the mobilization of available resources.

In making this initial assessment, be sure to position your investigation so as not to preclude the more serious situations. Assume that the child is in danger until the facts contradict that assumption. Consider all possibilities including situations in which the child has been abducted by a non-family member, is the victim of a violent custodial dispute, or is missing under circumstances that threaten his or her welfare or safety.

This checklist is meant to provide a framework of actions that can assist in performing competent, and successful preliminary investigations and searches during each missing child investigation / or search.

### **Duties of the First Responder**

- [ ] Promptly respond to the location of the call and contact the reporting person.
- [ ] Verify that the child is in fact missing.
  - If the child is missing from home, officers should take in consideration that the child might be hiding and search the home and the yard area.
- [ ] Verify child's custody status.
  - Who is the child with and do they have legal authority?
- [ ] Identify if there are unusual circumstances of the disappearance.
  - The missing child is Under 12 years of age or any at risk child
  - The child is mentally incapacitated
  - The child may be Autistic or have Downs syndrome and wear **Project Lifesaver** transmitter
    - Refer to page 7 for instructions
  - Based on the information it is believed the missing child is in the company of individuals who could endanger his or her welfare
  - The individual is dependent on live-saving prescribed medications
  - The absence is inconsistent with his or her established patterns of behavior and the deviation cannot be readily explained
- [ ] Determine when, where, and by whom the child was last seen.
- [ ] Interview the individuals who last had contact with the child.
- [ ] Obtain a detailed description of the missing person
- [ ] Relay detailed descriptive information to E911 Emergency Communications Division for broadcast updates.
- [ ] Based on the available information, make an initial determination of the type of incident
- [ ] Contact your supervisor
- [ ] Request additional personnel if needed from zones and other precinct
  - Police resources: K-9, Air Unit, Dive teams, ATV's bike officers, motorcycles, side scan sonar for water searches, night vision goggles, detectives
  - EMS resources: Dive teams, ATV's, Bikes with medical gear, side scanner sonar for water searches, night vision goggles  
EMT's for ground searching personnel, Squad trucks, Support units to provide lighting, coffee and refreshment,

- Virginia Beach Search and Rescue (SAR) has resources of bloodhound dogs, additional state search and rescued personnel
- [ ] Request investigative assistance if necessary
- [ ] Obtain photographs of the missing person
- [ ] Brief all additional responding personnel including supervisors and investigative personnel of updates
- [ ] Ensure that everyone at the scene is identified and interviewed separately. Make sure that their interview and identifying information is properly recorded.
- Note name, address, home/business telephone numbers of each person
  - Determine each person's relationship to the missing person
  - Note information that each person may have about the disappearance
  - Determine when/where each person saw the missing person
  - Obtain names/addresses/telephone numbers of the child's friends/associates and other relatives and friends of the family
- [ ] Obtain and note permission to search home or building where the individual was last seen
- [ ] Conduct an immediate, thorough search of the missing person's home, even if the individual was reported missing from a different location
- [ ] Conduct a search to include all surrounding areas including vehicles and other places of concealment
- [ ] Secure the area for the point last seen for potential value later if bloodhounds or other tracking dogs are called in to the scene.

**\*In cases of Runaways/ Missing Person - See General Order 11.04**

- [ ] Based upon available information, the initial determination is that the child has run away
- [ ] The child is over twelve and is not at risk or there are no unusual circumstances surrounding the incident
- [ ] Determine if the child has runaway previously and previous locations where they were found
- [ ] Discuss with the parents every obvious location as to where the child could be to make sure that no area or possibility has been overlooked
- Does the child have access to credit cards or bank accounts?
  - Does the child work?
  - Who are their associates?
  - Does the child have boyfriend/girlfriend?
  - Does the child have access to motor vehicles or other forms of transportation?
  - Does the child have a history of court involvement?

- Who was the last to see the child

- [ ] Broadcast a be on the lookout bulletin (BOL) with E911 Emergency Communications Division personnel
- [ ] Proceed with G.O. 11.04 (Missing Persons) for reporting procedures

**In cases of Abduction - See General Order 11.04 (Missing Persons)**

- [ ] Based upon available information, the initial determination is that unknown persons or a parent has abducted the child
- [ ] Contact your supervisor for immediate response to initiate search efforts
- [ ] Notify Investigative Division
  - Only an Investigative Division supervisor may issue an Amber Alert
  - Criteria for Activation of amber Alert (CALEA 41.2.7 D)
  - Missing children must be 17 years of age or younger and there is a belief that the child has been abducted
  - There is a belief that the missing child is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm or death.
  - There has been investigation that verified that the abduction has taken place or eliminated alternative explanations for the disappearance of the child
  - Sufficient information is available to disseminate to the public that could assist in locating the child, suspect, and/or the suspect's vehicle.
  - The child must be entered into Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC)
  - This plan will not be activated for Runaways or Parental Abductions unless there is a threat of serious bodily injury or death to the child.

**Supervisory Responsibility**

- [ ] Obtain briefing from the first responding officers
- [ ] Determine if additional personnel are needed to assist in the investigation
- [ ] Establish Incident Command Post away from the residence in an area that will accommodate a large number of vehicles and personnel
- [ ] Establish Incident Command by notifying all units and E911 Emergency Communications Division of location and radio frequency for the operation
- [ ] Appoint scribe
- [ ] As incidents grow, the Incident Commander may delegate authority for performing certain activities to others as required. Refer to ICS guidelines contained in General Order 11.03 (ICS/NIMS)
- [ ] Ensure all required notifications are made

- Update chief dispatcher of situation and phone number
  - Request specialized resources, Detectives
  - Notify EMS for request of Virginia Beach Search And Rescue (SAR) Unit, search and rescue dogs, horses, field teams
  - Update your Chain of Command
  - Notify Command Duty Officer
  - Request additional search and rescue resources through communications supervisor
- [ ] Utilize Media Relations to assist if:
- Missing person has a life-threatening health problem
  - Extreme weather is present or is about to occur
  - It is during the hours of darkness, the person has been missing for more than two hours, and an active search is on going
- [ ] Ensure officers complete tasks of:
- Secure the point last seen (PLS) for scent tracking dogs.
  - Conduct a systematic search of the residence and grounds by law enforcement
  - Send patrols to areas the subject has been previously located or recently spoke about
  - Canvass the neighborhood
  - Consider time elapsed and distance possibly traveled (average person can walk approximately 4 miles in 1 hour)
  - Send teams into drainage areas, under growth, brush and nearby streams and water-ways immediately
- [ ] Notify neighboring law enforcement agencies
- [ ] Contact local hospitals (Emergency room)
- [ ] Contact local transportation hubs (taxi, bus, airports)
- [ ] Contact local shelters and jails
- [ ] Determine the initial search area for search and rescue efforts
- [ ] Notify change of shifts within department
- [ ] Brief on-coming Incident Commanders prior to being relieved of change of command
- [ ] Notify all staff of change in command
- [ ] Upon the completion of the operation, conduct a documented after action review in accordance with the provisions of General Order 11.03 (ICS/NIMS)

**Alzheimer's Disease or related memory impairment.**

An aggressive law enforcement response is required to protect life due to the urgency of the search for those who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or other related medical conditions that affect memory and judgment. Many individuals wander and become lost repeatedly due to the loss of memory.

Alzheimer's disease impacts navigation skills. With the loss of recent memory individuals cannot recognize landmarks they pass and become disoriented and lost; they lose the ability to judge time, which impacts their ability to judge distance. Lastly, they lose visual-spatial skills that provide people with a sense of direction. As the disease and the symptoms of dementia progress individuals with Alzheimer's disease lose more and more of the skills learned as children. One of those skills is the ability to turn around and that may be the reason why individuals will become stuck in briar or thickets and not be able to back out. They only know one direction and that is forward movement. A large percentage of these people could die if not located within 24 hours of their disappearance.

Because most people with Alzheimer's disease are located within a 1/2 mile radius of where they were last seen and tend to "go until they get stuck", it is important to conduct a search of all nearby by brush, briars, creeks, drainage culverts within the 1/2 mile radius immediately. In many nursing homes and assisted living facilities, many individuals have been found within the facility, so officers should conduct a thorough search of the premises and individual rooms and bed to ensure the person has left the building.

**Found Alzheimer's Persons**

Another encounter with Alzheimer's patients is the found person. Officers may encounter Alzheimer's persons involved in wandering on the street before the family has discovered them missing, they may be involved in erratic driving incidents or car crashes. They may have even wandered from other cities to Virginia Beach. Although there are sometimes no visible physical characteristics of Alzheimer's Disease, the average victim exhibits signs which may help the officer determine that a person suffers from dementia/Alzheimer's disease. Some of those signs include, but are not limited to, confusion, facial expression, age, inappropriate dress, forgetfulness, communication problems, delusions, hallucinations, disorientation of time and place.

Always communicate slowly and calmly. Identify yourself and ask simple questions giving the person ample time to respond. Avoid instructions that require the subject to do more than one thing at a time. Avoid restraints if possible; however, OFFICER SAFETY is of first importance. Look for identification on the person, their clothing or on the items they may be carried or worn. Safe Return provides bracelets, necklaces and clothing labels. Individuals enrolled in Project Lifesaver may wear the transmitter on the wrist or ankle. Both these forms of identification will enable officers to return the found person back to the original caregivers.

If you are unable to immediately locate a family member notify Adult Protective Services. Mental Health may also need to be contacted depending on the circumstances of the situation if an officer believes that the person presents an imminent danger to themselves or others as a result of the mental illness. Contacting the E911 Emergency Communications Division will also serve as a resource. Officers should advise the dispatcher of the found individual with as much information as possible to obtain. They will access to information on previous missing persons reports from other precincts or other jurisdictions and will also receive calls from family of the missing person.

This checklist is meant to provide a framework of actions that can assist in performing competent, and successful investigations and searches during each search for Alzheimer's patients or individuals with special needs.

### **Duties of the First Responder**

- [ ] Promptly respond to the location of the call and contact the reporting person.
- [ ] Determine the search urgency for the individual based on information related to their age, their medical conditions, the inappropriate clothing worn for elements and the existing weather concerns and hazards present within the terrain. See index 1.
- [ ] Determine if the individual is enrolled in either **Project Lifesaver** or **Safe Return** programs.
  - **Project Lifesaver**- provides personalized radio transmitters to each individual in the program who may be at risk of wandering. This includes Alzheimer's patients and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Downs Syndrome. Trained officers with the specialized equipment then track the individuals wearing the transmitters. Virginia Beach Police is a Project Lifesaver police department.
    - Individuals who are enrolled in Project Lifesaver will already be entered into the CAD system. Caregivers of these clients have been instructed to contact 9-1-1 if the individual is missing.
    - A case will be entered for MIPR and assigned to the nearest zone unit and also the zone units supervisor will be notified.
    - The E-911 Emergency Communications Division Operations Supervisor will contact the Project Lifesaver coordinator and update the case comments.
    - The Project Lifesaver Supervisor will respond and coordinate the search utilizing the Incident Command System.
    - Additionally the Project Lifesaver officers assigned to the client will be respond to the point last seen and act as a liaison with the family and the police department.
    - The Assigned Project Lifesaver Officer will be responsible for filling out the IBR (PD-18)
  - **Safe Return** - a nationwide identification, support and registration program. Safe Return can provide assistance whether a person becomes lost. They can also assist with individuals who are found and are unable to provide any information. They will provide information and assistance to Law Enforcement. 1-888-572-8566.
- [ ] Verify that the person is in fact missing
  - If the individual is missing from home, officers should take in consideration that the person might be hiding and will not respond to calls from searchers.
  - Search the home and the yard area paying attention to any areas of brush piles, briars or thick vegetation, water ways, drainage culverts, etc.
  - Assisted Living Facilities should also be searched even if the complainant has advised they have already searched. The outside area should also be searched.
- [ ] Determine when, where, and by whom the missing person was last seen.

- [ ] Interview the individuals who last had contact with the missing person.
- [ ] Obtain a detailed description of the missing person
- [ ] Relay detailed descriptive information to E911 Emergency Communications Division for broadcast updates.
- [ ] Contact your supervisor
- [ ] Request additional personnel
- [ ] Request investigative assistance if necessary
- [ ] Obtain photographs of the missing person
- [ ] Brief all additional responding personnel including supervisors and investigative personnel of updates
- [ ] Ensure that everyone at the scene is identified and interviewed separately. Make sure that their interview and identifying information is properly recorded.
  - Note name, address, home/business telephone numbers of each person
  - Determine each person's relationship to the missing person
  - Note information that each person may have about the disappearance
  - Determine when/where each person saw the missing person
  - Obtain names/addresses/telephone numbers of associates and other relatives and friends of the family
  - Determine if the individual was recently describing a specific person or place in their lives
  - Determine if the individual has ever wandered before
- [ ] Obtain and note permission to search home or building where the individual was last seen
- [ ] Conduct an immediate, thorough search of the missing person's home, even if the individual was reported missing from a different location
- [ ] Conduct search to include all surrounding areas including vehicles and other places of concealment

### **Supervisory Responsibility**

- [ ] Obtain briefing from the first responding officers
- [ ] Determine if additional personnel are needed to assist in the investigation
- [ ] Establish Incident Command Post away from the residence in an area that will accommodate a large number of vehicles and personnel
- [ ] Obtain briefing from the first responding officers

- [ ] Establish Incident Command by notifying all units and E911 Emergency Communications of location and radio frequency for the operation
- [ ] Appoint a scribe
- [ ] As incidents grow, the Incident Commander may delegate authority for performing certain activities to others as required. Refer to ICS guidelines
- [ ] Ensure all required notifications are made
  - Update The E-911 Emergency Communications Division Operations Supervisor of situation and phone number
  - Request specialized resources, Detectives
  - Notify EMS for request of Virginia Beach Search And Rescue (SAR) Unit, search and rescue dogs, horses, field teams
  - Update your Chain of Command
  - Notify Command Duty Officer
  - Request additional search and rescue resources through communications supervisor
- [ ] Utilize the Public Information Office to assist if:
  - Missing person has a life-threatening health problem
  - Extreme weather
  - It is during the hours of darkness, the person has been missing for more than two hours, and an active search is on going
- [ ] Assign tasks:
  - Secure the point last seen (PLS) as a crime scene
  - Conduct a systematic search of residence/nursing home and grounds by law enforcement again.
  - Send patrols to areas the subject has been previously located or recently spoke about
  - Canvass the neighborhood
  - Patrol along roads between pervious home sites and the point last seen
  - Consider time elapsed and distance possibly traveled (average person walks 4 miles in 1 hour)
  - Send teams into drainage areas, under growth, bush and nearby streams and water-ways immediately
- [ ] Notify neighboring law enforcement agencies
- [ ] Contact local hospitals (Emergency room and Psychiatric wards)
- [ ] Contact local transportation hubs (taxi, bus, airports)
- [ ] Contact local shelters and jails
- [ ] Determine the initial search area for search and rescue efforts
- [ ] Notify change of shifts within department

- [ ] Brief on-coming Incident Commanders prior to being relieved of change of command
- [ ] Notify all staff of change in command
- [ ] Upon the completion of the operation, conduct a documented after action review in accordance with the provisions of General Order 11.03 (ICS/NIMS)

**Appendix I**

This is a general checklist for law enforcement agencies to determine the urgency of search efforts utilized by Virginia Department of Emergency Services for Alzheimer’s searches. The overall score assigned will assist in determining the urgency of the search efforts to determine manpower and resources needed within the time constraints for a successful recovery.

Any Alzheimer’s search subject with poor weather should be considered an Emergency. Searches for a known fatality become less urgent

**Weather Profile:**

- Recent past and /or short term forecast for severe weather 1
- Forecast for severe weather within 8 hours or less 1-2
- Forecast for severe weather more than 8 hours away 2
- No forecast for weather change 3

**Location Terrain/Hazard Profile:**

- Known hazards in the area or difficult terrain in suspect area 1
- Few or no known hazards in the area 2

**Age:**

- Age greater than 65 1
- All other ages 2

**Medical Condition:**

- Known or suspected illness, injury, or memory problems 1
- Known fatality (i.e.: drowning/suicide) 3

**Number of subjects in Party:**

- One person out alone or with another Alzheimer’s patient 1
- Alzheimer’s subject lost with someone of normal cognitive ability 2-3

**Subject Preparedness Profile:**

- Inadequate clothing or equipment for environment and weather 1
- Questionable clothing for environment 2

**Subject Experience Profile:**

- Not experienced outdoors and does not know the area 1
- Not experienced, but remembers the area 2
- Recalls outdoor experiences and does not know the area 3
- Recalls outdoor experiences and remembers the area 4

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Total Score =

## Search Management Resource Guide

### Emergency Search =7-12 points

All resources should be called immediately and actively searching within 2 hours of reports of the missing person

<b>Initial Personnel Needed</b>	<b>After 0-2 hours</b>
Additional law enforcement	Search management (Overhead team)
Investigator	Trained field teams
Local tracking/trailing dogs	Trained team leaders
Helicopter (FLIR)	Trailing dogs
Local SAR resources	Air-scent dogs
Local Fire/Rescue	Man trackers
	Horses, Bike
	PIO
	Logistical support

### High Urgency = 13 -17 points

All resources actively searching within 6 hours of report of missing

<b>Initial Personnel Needed</b>	<b>After 2-6 hours</b>
Additional law enforcement	Search management (Overhead team)
Investigator	Trained field teams
Local tracking/trailing dogs	Trained team leaders
Helicopter (FLIR)	Trailing dogs
Local SAR resources	Air-scent dogs
	Man trackers
	Horses, Bike
	PIO
	Logistical support
	Local Fire/Rescue

### Moderate Urgency = 18-22 points

All resources should actively be searching within 12 hours

<b>Initial Personnel Needed</b>	<b>After 4-12 hours</b>
Additional law enforcement	Search management (Overhead team)
Investigator	Trained field teams
Local tracking/trailing dogs	Trained team leaders
Helicopter (FLIR)	Trailing dogs
Local SAR resources	Air-scent dogs
	Man trackers
	Horses, Bike
	PIO
	Logistical support
	Local Fire/Rescue

## **Appendix II**

### **SEARCH AND RESCUE RESOURCES**

#### Virginia Beach Police Department Resources

Available via Special Operations Supervisors

Air Unit, Marine Patrol, Dive Team, Side Scan Sonar, Night Vision goggles

#### Virginia Beach Emergency Management Services

EMS 5 coordinates search and rescue teams in Virginia Beach

Contact via Chief Dispatcher

Dive Team, Side Scan Sonar, Night Vision goggles, EMT's ground searchers,  
Support 9 – lights, snacks, drinks

#### Virginia Beach Search and Rescue-available for 24 hours

Local Search and Rescue Services

Bikes, ATV, computerized mapping capabilities, copy equipment and contacts for statewide services, i.e. bloodhounds

#### Virginia Department of Emergency Management – available for 24 hours

Statewide Search and Rescue Services at no cost to locality.

Phone 1-800-468-8892

#### Tidewater Alzheimer's Association- Local Chapter 757-459-2404

Provides education, support and advocacy assistance for persons with Alzheimer's disease, their families and caregivers.

#### Project Lifesaver Virginia Beach Police coordinator

Commanding Officer of the Community Engagement Unit (757) 385-1006

Project Lifesaver International 757-546-5502