



Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

Sheriff Carl Ritchie

9-16 Missing Persons

- New
- Revised
- Reviewed

ACA Standards Reference:
CALEA Standards Reference: 41.2.5, 41.2.6, 46.2.5
NCCHC Standards Reference:
SCLEA Standards Reference:
SC Minimum Standards:

This policy dated 1/28/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.

I. Purpose:

To establish procedures for the investigation of missing persons.

II. Policy:

The Charleston County Sheriff's Office will diligently investigate all reports of missing persons. The Sheriff's Office realizes a heightened responsibility for children and vulnerable adults and is dedicated to the protection and recovery of missing, abused and/or exploited children and at-risk adults. Equally, the agency will assure safe haven and the protection of law for unidentified and/or abandoned children and vulnerable adults. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.6 item a)

III. Definitions:

A. For purposes of this procedure, the word "deputy" applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I, Class II, Class III, or Reserve Deputy, as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

The following terms are used interchangeably; however, they carry guidance to specific employees based on usage of the term:

1. Deputy, deputies, deputy sheriff, detention deputy, sworn employee, uniformed sworn employee, sworn administrative employee, and
2. civilian, non-sworn employee.

B. *Employee:* When used without further clarification, the term employee is inclusive of all agency members (sworn and non-sworn).

IV. Procedure:

A. Dispatchers receiving a report of missing persons will attempt to obtain as much information about the situation as possible prior to dispatching the call.

B. No missing person report will be taken over the phone. Personal contact will be made with the complainant.

C. In the event the missing person is a juvenile or an adult with diminishing capacity, the report will immediately be assigned to a deputy sheriff and the on-duty supervisor advised. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.6 item b)

- D. Sworn personnel arriving on the scene will obtain all necessary information, to include:
1. height, weight, color of hair and eyes;
 2. use of eyeglasses or contacts;
 3. skin color;
 4. physical or mental disability;
 5. scars or marks;
 6. date and place of birth;
 7. detailed description of clothing;
 8. recent photographs;
 9. Social Security Number, driver's license number if applicable;
 10. names and addresses of parents and relatives;
 11. nicknames;
 12. names and addresses of friends;
 13. locations frequented;
 14. determine if dental records are available;
 15. determine if fingerprints of the child are available; and
 16. any vehicle information.
- (Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item a, 41.2.6 item e)
- E. Upon taking any missing persons report, the reporting deputy sheriff will take prompt action including, but not limited to, the following procedures:
1. Notify the on-duty supervisor if the dispatcher has not already done so. The supervisor may approve the call out of agency specialized units such as CID, Canine, or Air Support to any scene.

2. Advise the Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center (9-1-1 Center) of any necessary BOLOs to include notifying adjacent law enforcement agencies if circumstances dictate.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item *b*, 41.2.6 item *c*)
 3. Conduct a search if circumstances dictate. A search will be conducted for missing children, for elderly persons or disabled persons who have “wandered away,” when foul play is suspected or as otherwise determined by a supervisor. If a child, elderly, or disabled person is missing, a search of the home and immediate area will be conducted. Also, searches will be made of areas the person is known to frequent. Contact will also be made with acquaintances and/or relatives the missing person is likely to contact.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item *f* and *g*, 41.2.6 items *c* and *e*, 46.2.5)
- F. State Law Enforcement Division (SLED)/ NCIC entry can be made on missing persons when the missing person falls into one or more of the following categories:
1. Juvenile - for the purpose of SLED/NCIC entry, a person under the age of 18.
 2. Disability - A person of any age who is missing and under proven physical/mental disability or is senile, thereby subjecting themselves or others to personal and immediate danger.
 3. Endangered - A person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that their physical safety may be in danger.
 4. Involuntary - A person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that their disappearance may not have been voluntary.
 5. Catastrophe - A person of any age who is missing after a catastrophe.
 6. Other - A person over the age of 17 where there is reasonable concern for that person’s safety, but the person does not meet the criteria for entry in any other category. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item *g*, 41.2.6 items *c*)
- G. Upon receiving information from the reporting deputy sheriff, an NCIC entry will be made by the Records Division during normal business hours or the 9-1-1 Center after normal business hours. If there are any questions as to the appropriateness of entry the on-duty supervisor, 9-1-1 Center supervisor or Records supervisor will be contacted for guidance.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 items *b* & *c*)

- H. All missing persons reported to this agency will be documented in an *Incident Report* regardless of whether or not the missing person meets SLED/NCIC entry criteria.
- I. The investigating deputy sheriff will follow up with the complainant to make reasonable efforts to acquire additional information about the missing person to aid the investigation and/or update or add to the NCIC entry.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item e, 41.2.6 items e and f)
- J. A SLED *Missing Child/Juvenile Data Collection Form* will be completed by Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and forwarded to SLED's Missing Persons Information Center at the end of each month.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item f, 41.2.6 item f)
- K. When the missing person has been located or the missing child has returned to the home of, or to the care, custody, and control of their parents or legal guardian, and this agency has received the notification that the person is no longer missing, the deputy sheriff receiving the notification will request the Records Division or 9-1-1 Center remove the information from the NCIC computer immediately. Personal contact by a certified law enforcement officer must be made with the located missing person. If the missing person is reported as located outside of the agency's jurisdiction, a request will be made to that jurisdiction to send a certified law enforcement officer to verify the identity of the missing person. The deputy sheriff will then file a *Supplemental Report* to include, but not limited to:
 - 1. location where missing person was found; and
 - 2. to whom the missing person was released, if applicable.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.6 item f)
- L. If a case involves the voluntary disappearance by an adult, the adult's whereabouts cannot be released without the permission of the located adult. The complainant may be notified that the missing person has been located but declines to release their whereabouts. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 items c and e)
- M. South Carolina Amber Alert (SCAA):
 - 1. The SCAA is a voluntary, cooperative, and coordinated initiative between the Charleston County Sheriff's Office, other participating law enforcement agencies and radio and television stations to send a rapid emergency alert via the Emergency Alert System (EAS). Upon activation the system will notify the public when a child is missing,

and law enforcement has reason to believe that the child's life is in grave danger.

2. SCAA is part of the Local Communications Committee's written plan, as outlined in the FCC's EAS rules. Participating agencies' adherence to strict guidelines prevents overuse and ensures compliance with EAS requirements.
3. The SCAA Task Force will consist of representatives from participating law enforcement agencies, the Emergency Communications Committee, emergency management personnel, and radio and television stations. The task force is responsible for:
 - a. developing criteria and procedures for the plan;
 - b. ensuring that alerts are distributed in a timely fashion;
 - c. conducting quarterly tests of the SCAA notification process;
 - d. ensuring training of law enforcement agencies and broadcast representatives to include development of training materials;
 - e. developing a public relations plan;
 - f. maintaining relevant data on the program;
 - g. overseeing the plan's effectiveness;
 - h. an annual review, evaluation, and revision, as appropriate, of the plan's procedures; and
 - i. providing the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children with program successes and shortcomings so that it can serve as a national clearing house for Amber Plan information.
4. The SCAA will only be activated on incidents meeting strict established criteria to include:
 - a. a non-parental child abduction;
 - b. a missing child with evidence of foul play;
 - c. a stolen or car-jacked vehicle with a child inside; or

- d. a missing child whose behavior or mental capacity in some way contributes to their disappearance and the child is endangered.
5. Although each case will be judged on an individual basis, law enforcement must have cause to believe the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.
6. Alerts will normally be restricted to children 16 years old or younger, or a person 17 years of age or older with a proven mental and/or physical disability who has been unwillingly removed from their environment without permission from the child's legal guardian or a designated legal representative.
7. Alerts will not normally be made for parental abductions or runaways unless law enforcement believes the life of the child is in danger.
8. The alert should not be activated when:
 - a. a child runs away from home;
 - b. in a custody dispute when the child is not considered to be endangered; or
 - c. a missing adult. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 item *d*, 41.2.6 item *d*)
9. If the criterion for activation is met, the following information will be distributed to radio and television stations:
 - a. description of the child;
 - b. description of the perpetrator, if available;
 - c. description of the vehicle(s), if any;
 - d. time and location of incident;
 - e. updates regarding the search; and
 - f. a contact number for information from the public.
10. The Charleston County Sheriff's Office will appoint SCAA supervisors from CID. The supervisors must be trained by SLED on Amber Alert Protocol. A current list of agency SCAA Supervisors will be maintained in CID and the 9-1-1 Center.

11. A SCAA may only be activated with the approval of a SCAA Supervisor.
 12. In the event of a SCAA situation, the Patrol supervisor will respond to the scene and determine if the incident meets SCAA notification criteria.
 13. The SCAA supervisor will first make telephone contact with SLED, then fax the alert to them on the *SCAA Information Form* along with a photograph of the victim.
 14. The 9-1-1 Center will be notified by SLED, via BOLO, when the EAS station confirms receipt of the information. Once confirmed, the 9-1-1 Center should advise the SCAA supervisor that the alert was broadcasted.
 15. The 9-1-1 Center will be responsible for contacting SLED in the event of any updates related to the missing child.
 16. After the missing child is located, the SCAA supervisor will cancel the alert by contacting SLED so that the public and other law enforcement agencies can be informed of the closure of the event.
- N. Protection of Unidentified and/or Abandoned Children:
1. If an abandoned and/or unidentified child is located, the deputy sheriff will request any necessary medical assistance.
 2. The Criminal Investigation Division (CID) may be notified to respond to investigate as necessary.
 3. If CID responds, CID will be responsible for any necessary notification of DSS. If CID's assistance is not necessary, any required DSS notification is the responsibility of the responding deputy sheriff.
 4. Pursuant to Section [§63-7-40 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended, the Safe Haven for Abandoned Babies Act](#), otherwise known as Daniel's Law, states in part:
 - a. A hospital or hospital outpatient facility operating in this state must, without a court order, take temporary physical custody of an infant who is voluntarily left with the hospital or hospital outpatient facility by a person who does not express an intent to return for the infant and the circumstances give rise to a reasonable belief that the person does not intend to return for

the infant. The hospital or hospital outpatient facility must perform any act necessary to protect the physical health or safety of the infant. The person leaving the infant is not required to disclose their identity.

5. CID or the responding deputy sheriff will determine if the abandonment falls under the aforementioned section and ensure the appropriate actions are taken. (Ref: CALEA 41.2.6 items *e* and *f*)

O. Protection of Vulnerable Adults:

1. Deputy Sheriffs will be sensitive to the needs of vulnerable adults.
2. Necessary medical assistance will be requested.
3. If the deputy sheriff fears there is imminent danger that the individual will harm themselves or others, mental health professionals are available to determine if the individual should be committed or is eligible for crisis stabilization. If qualified clinicians determine that the individual is not eligible for crisis mental health intervention, personnel are reminded that other resources may be available.
4. Every effort will be made to assure that the vulnerable adult is not a missing person or the victim of a crime.
(Ref: CALEA 41.2.5 items *f* and *g*)