

MESA POLICE Department Policy Manual	Missing Persons Investigations	DPM 3.1.60 Effective 04/06/2012 Revised 08/18/2026
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1. PURPOSE

This policy provides Mesa Police Department (MPD) members with response, investigation, reporting, and recovery guidelines for incidents involving missing persons.

2. DEFINITIONS

Missing Person: A person who is reported missing, whose whereabouts are not known. For purposes of this policy, a missing person can be categorized as any of the following:

Endangered Missing Person: A missing person who is subject to immediate danger, and/or who is a danger to others, due to one or more exigent conditions defined in this policy inclusive of age, physical disability, mental disability, life threatening situation, and/or unusual circumstances.

Habitual Runaway: A person who is 14 years of age up to 18 years of age, who has been reported as missing per the reporting party (RP) with at least three runaway reports on file with any police agency within 12 months and that are not otherwise endangered.

Missing Adult: Missing person, 21 years of age or older, whose whereabouts are unknown to family members or a concerned party.

Missing Juvenile: Missing person, under the age of 18, whose whereabouts are unknown to their custodial parent, guardian, or caregiver.

Missing Young Adult (Suzanne's Law): A person who is 18, 19 or 20 years of age, whose whereabouts are unknown to family members or a concerned party. Pursuant to [Suzanne's Law](#), codified at 34 USC 41307, law enforcement is required to enter into NCIC when a person under the age of 21 is reported missing.

National Crime Information Center (NCIC) System: For purposes of this policy, a nationwide information system that assists criminal justice agencies by maintaining and providing a filing system of accurate and timely documented criminal justice information, including missing persons information.

Tier System: A method of triaging missing persons incidents from most urgent to least urgent. Each tier includes specific protocols for notifications and media release guidelines.

Unidentified Person: A person, of any age, who is living and unable to ascertain their identity (e.g., amnesia victim, infant, unconscious, etc.).

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3. POLICY

- A. The Department's response to a missing person report is determined by the assessment of information gathered during the initial investigation. Therefore, it is the policy of the MPD that all reports of missing persons:
 1. Be given full consideration and attention by members of this agency.
There is no time limit necessary for a person to be missing prior to a report being taken.
 2. Have police personnel investigate the factual circumstances surrounding individuals reported as missing.
 3. Have resources focused on finding endangered missing persons.

4. TIER SYSTEM

4.1 General

- A. Missing persons incidents are triaged utilizing a three-tiered system, with Tier 1 being the most urgent (e.g., Amber and SAFE Alerts) and Tier 3 being the least urgent (e.g., Attempt to Locates).
- B. For notification and media release guidelines for all tiers, see [DPM 2.6.35 Alerts & Media Releases](#).

4.2 Tier 1: Amber, SAFE & Turquoise Alerts

- A. All Amber, SAFE and Turquoise Alerts are classified as Tier 1 incidents.
- B. For information on Amber, SAFE and Turquoise Alert criteria and activation, see [DPM 2.6.35 Alerts & Media Releases](#).

4.3 Tier 2: Endangered Missing Persons

- A. Tier 2 includes endangered missing persons who **do not** meet the criteria for Amber, SAFE or Turquoise Alert activation.
- B. Per this policy, an endangered missing person is defined as a person subject to immediate danger, and/or is a danger to others, due to one or more of the following exigent circumstances:
 1. **Age**
 - a. Juvenile is under 8 years of age; or
 - b. Juvenile is 8-12 years of age who:
 - Never returned home from school and has no history of running away; and/or
 - Is missing at night with no history of running away.
 2. **Physical Disability**

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- a. Any physical or medical condition that requires the person to be continually supervised by another; and/or
 - b. The person must take daily medication to avoid imminent danger to themselves.
 - c. *Medical records; physician, psychiatrist, or physical therapist statements; and/or prescriptions are some of the methods used to prove physical disability.*
3. **Mental Health Disability**
 - a. Any emotional or mental health condition which severely limits a person's ability to provide for their safety and/or limits the person's ability to communicate.
 - b. *Such a condition normally requires a person to be continually supervised by another person to prevent the person from committing harm to themselves and to receive the proper care in their daily life.*
4. **Endangered**
 - a. Missing person is in a life-threatening situation or potentially hazardous environmental or weather conditions; and/or
 - b. Is an imminent danger to themselves or others; and/or
 - c. Is believed to be with others who could endanger the missing person's welfare.
5. **Unusual/Other Circumstances**
 - a. Circumstances indicate the disappearance is involuntary or suspicious, such as:
 - Abducted/kidnapped; and/or
 - Victim of domestic violence; and/or
 - Subject of foul play; and/or
 - Missing after natural disaster, accident, or catastrophe.

4.4 Tier 3: Attempt to Locates (ATLs)

- A. Tier 3 refers to all other missing persons, who are not classified as Tier 1 or Tier 2, yet the RP would like an attempt to be made to locate the missing person.

5. INITIAL RESPONSE & INVESTIGATION

5.1 General

- A. A missing person report should be filed in the jurisdiction in which the missing person was last seen, if known. If a missing person was last seen in another jurisdiction, the member should direct the RP to the agency where the missing person was last seen to file a report.

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- B. Officers and Missing Persons Unit Investigators should use [DPM 3.1.60A2 Missing Persons Investigative Guide](#) when completing a missing persons investigation.

5.2 Missing Juveniles & Young Adults

- A. Patrol officers will respond to the RP's location, if inside the City of Mesa (COM), and initiate an investigation into a missing juvenile or young adult.
 - 1. If call comments or other information indicates a missing juvenile is potentially a habitual runaway, the officer may make contact telephonically.
 - a. If it is determined by telephone that the juvenile is a habitual runaway, and no situation exists that would otherwise indicate the juvenile is endangered, a report may be taken telephonically, unless a personal response is requested by the RP.
- B. If the RP is outside of the COM, refer to **Section 5.4**.
- C. Assess whether incident meets Tier 1 or Tier 2 criteria, and if there is a need to activate an Amber, SAFE or Turquoise Alert pursuant to [DPM 2.6.35 Alerts & Media Releases](#).
 - 1. Notify supervisor of any incident determined to be Tier 1 or Tier 2.
 - a. Upon supervisor approval, notify the on-call Special Victims Unit (SVU) Sergeant.
 - b. If the incident is Tier 1, the Division Commander must also be notified.
- D. Patrol supervisors will arrange and coordinate searches as appropriate based on information received. Initiate incident command when necessary pursuant to [DPM 2.6.25 Incident Command System Protocols](#).
- E. Contact the Criminal Justice Information Division (CJID) and have the missing juvenile or young adult entered into NCIC without delay and within 2 hours of receiving the minimum data required for NCIC entry. [ALEAP 26.4]
 - 1. Mandatory information includes name, date of birth/age, date of last contact, GO#, circumstances surrounding the disappearance, race, sex, height, weight, and eye and hair color.
- F. Members may provide [DPM 3.1.60A1 The Runaway Brochure](#) as a resource to parents or guardians of runaways when applicable.
- G. Inform the RP to contact the MPD immediately if the missing person returns or is located.

5.3 Missing Adults

- A. When dispatched as a Priority 2, patrol officers will immediately respond to the RP's location (if inside the COM) and initiate the investigation for any missing adult age 21 or older.
 - 1. Assess whether incident meets Tier 1 or Tier 2 criteria, and if there is a need to activate a SAFE or Turquoise Alert pursuant to [DPM 2.6.35 Alerts & Media Releases](#).

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- a. Notify supervisor of any incident determined to be Tier 1 or Tier 2.
 - Upon supervisor approval, notify the on-call SVU Sergeant.
2. Patrol supervisors will arrange and coordinate searches as appropriate based on information received. Initiate incident command when necessary pursuant to [DPM 2.6.25 Incident Command System Protocols](#).
- B. When dispatched as a Priority 5, the officer may contact the RP by telephone to determine if a personal response is warranted.
 1. An adult missing person report may be taken telephonically when the incident meets the criteria of Tier 3, unless a personal response is requested by the RP.
- C. If the RP is calling from outside the COM, refer to **Section 5.4**.
- D. Have the RP complete [DPM 3.1F35 Affidavit to Missing Person Report](#) as soon as possible. It can be returned to the MPD electronically, by mail, fax, or in person. This affidavit is required before the missing person can be entered into NCIC and aids in the protection of the individual's right to privacy.
 1. As soon as possible after receiving the minimum data required for NCIC entry and receipt of the signed affidavit, contact the CJID and have the missing adult entered into NCIC. [ALEAP 26.4]
 - a. Mandatory information includes name, date of birth/age, date of last contact, GO#, circumstances surrounding the disappearance, race, sex, height, weight, and eye and hair color.
 2. Forward the signed affidavit to the CJID to be attached to the case.
- E. Inform the RP to contact the MPD immediately if the missing person returns or is located.

5.4 Reporting from Outside COM Jurisdiction

- A. If the RP is making a report from outside the COM, take the report telephonically.
- B. Contact the CJID and have the missing person entered into NCIC.
 1. If the missing person is a juvenile or young adult, enter into NCIC without delay and within 2 hours of receiving the minimum data required for NCIC entry. An affidavit is not required for NCIC entry.
 2. If the missing person is an adult, have the RP complete [DPM 3.1F35 Affidavit to Missing Person Report](#) as soon as possible. It can be returned to the MPD electronically, by mail, fax, or in person. This affidavit is required before the missing person can be entered into NCIC and aids in the protection of the individual's right to privacy. [ALEAP 26.4]
 - a. Enter into NCIC as soon as possible after receiving the minimum data required for NCIC entry and receipt of the signed affidavit.
 - b. Forward the signed affidavit to the CJID to be attached to the case.
- C. Inform the RP to contact the MPD immediately if the missing person returns or is located.

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6. REPORTING & DOCUMENTATION

- A. The RP, under most circumstances, should be from a credible source other than the investigating police agency, such as a spouse, parent, legal guardian, next of kin, physician, or other credible source, including a friend or neighbor in unusual circumstances.
- B. The assigned officer will complete a GO for all missing persons except:
 1. When the missing person is found as a result of an immediate search; and
 2. No criminal act was involved; and
 3. The missing person was not entered in NCIC.
 4. In these cases, a Field Interview (FI) card shall be submitted with the missing person's information if a GO is not completed.
- C. Complete a missing person report as soon as possible. **Do not place on hold** pursuant to [DPM 3.3.35 Department Reporting Protocols](#).
- D. If applicable, list additional criteria of the missing person in the GO including, but not limited to, any information that would elevate the missing person to a Tier 1 or Tier 2.
- E. Reports of missing juveniles who are wards of the court, and who leave foster homes or shelters without permission, will include the following information:
 1. The name, address, and phone number of the organization placing the missing juvenile in the foster home/shelter.
 2. The name and phone number of the missing juvenile's caseworker and/or probation officer.
- F. Attach a copy of any photographs of the missing person to the report.
- G. Complete one GO for each missing person.
 1. If separate GO numbers are related, ensure the cases are linked in the Records Management System (RMS). *For example, multiple juveniles have run away from a group home.*
- H. Complete an "Assist – Missing Person FOJ" GO for each person who has been reported missing from another jurisdiction and is later located in the COM.
- I. When a missing person is found or information is developed relating to an open case, complete a supplement to the original report.
 1. Contact the CJID and request an update to the NCIC entry with any new information that could assist in locating the missing person.
- J. For all reports involving a habitual runaway:
 1. The Missing Persons Unit will verify that the juvenile is a habitual runaway and supplement the original report. No further action will be taken unless:
 - a. If the juvenile is determined to be a ward of the state, the Missing Persons Unit will notify the habitual runaway's case worker, probation officer, and/or the Department of Child Safety (DCS) of the case; or
 - b. It is determined that the juvenile is endangered or otherwise meets the criteria for response.

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7. RECOVERY

7.1 Missing Juveniles

- A. When a missing juvenile is located:
1. Confirm the juvenile's identity. Upon confirmation, advise the juvenile that they are listed as a missing juvenile.
 2. Ascertain if the juvenile needs medical assistance (e.g., if the juvenile was rescued from sex trafficking, hostage situation, etc.) and ensure medical assistance is provided promptly if needed.
 3. Determine if foul play or criminal activity was involved. If it was, the officer will investigate the matter for possible charges against other individuals.
 4. Notify the guardian that the juvenile has been located safely and arrange for transportation back to their custody, unless:
 - a. Abuse or neglect by the guardian is suspected; the guardian refuses to accept the juvenile; or the guardian cannot be located. In these cases, DCS must be contacted and take temporary protective custody of the juvenile if applicable pursuant to [ARS 8-821](#).
 - b. The juvenile is a ward of the court, in which case the juvenile's caseworker or probation officer must be contacted.
 - c. The juvenile is listed as a runaway or wanted from another state, in which case the juvenile shall be taken directly to the Durango Juvenile Detention Center for booking.
 - The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides an exception that juvenile status offenders can be detained if found in another state.
 - The detention center staff should be made aware that the juvenile is listed as a runaway or wanted in another state and that the juvenile will be detained pending Interstate Compact for Juveniles (ICJ) proceedings.
 - d. The juvenile has committed a serious delinquent act and will be placed in a detention center or holding facility, notwithstanding the status as a runaway.
 5. If the child is FOJ, notify the other jurisdiction and assist in the recovery and transfer of the juvenile.
 6. Have the juvenile removed from NCIC as soon as possible by contacting the CJID.
 7. Create a supplemental report detailing the recovery if the original report was taken in Mesa; or an "Assist – Missing Person FOJ" GO for each

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juvenile who has been reported as a runaway from another jurisdiction and is later located in the COM.

8. Contact the Media Relations Office (MRO) to ensure any related bulletins, alerts, and social media pages are updated that the juvenile has been located.

7.2 Missing Adults & Young Adults

- A. Competent adults (over the age of 18) who have made a personal decision to leave cannot be forced to return to a previous location.
- B. When the adult is located safely, and the adult is competent to make decisions:
 1. Confirm the missing person's identity. Upon confirmation, advise the person that they are the subject of a missing persons investigation.
 2. Ascertain if the person needs medical assistance (e.g., if the person was rescued from sex trafficking, hostage situation, etc.) and ensure medical assistance is provided promptly if needed.
 3. Determine if foul play or criminal activity was involved. If it was, investigate the matter for possible charges against other individuals.
 4. Ask if they desire the RP or family members to be notified of their whereabouts.
 - a. If the person decides that they do not want them notified, only inform the RP that the adult has been located safely; no location information will be given out.
 - b. If the person requests the RP or family be notified of their location, make provisions to transmit this information.
 5. Have the person removed from NCIC as soon as possible by contacting the CJID.
 6. Create a supplemental report detailing the recovery if the original report was taken in Mesa; or an "Assist – Missing Person FOJ" GO if the found person was reported missing in another jurisdiction and located in the COM.
 7. Contact the MRO to ensure any related bulletins, alerts, and social media pages are updated that the adult has been located.

7.3 Unidentified Recovered Persons

- A. Unidentified recovered persons (juvenile, young adult, and adult) will be investigated by patrol. This policy does not apply to deceased persons.
- B. Patrol officers will immediately respond to the RP's location to take a report. Interview the RP and recovered person, if possible.
- C. Search the recovery location for evidence of identification.

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- D. Contact the CJID and have the unidentified recovered person entered into NCIC as an Unidentified Person if the person gives consent for entry or is physically or mentally unable to give consent.
- E. Notify supervisor, and upon their approval, the on-call SVU Sergeant of any:
 1. Unidentified recovered person; and/or
 2. Recovered juvenile who is turned over to the DCS or the Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI); and
 - a. is not listed as a missing person in NCIC; and
 - b. Initial attempts to locate a parent/guardian are unsuccessful.

REFERENCES

- [ARS 8-821 Taking into temporary custody](#)
- [DPM 3.1F35 Affidavit to Missing Person Report](#)
- [DPM 2.6.25 Incident Command System Protocols](#)
- [DPM 2.6.35 Alerts & Media Releases](#)
- [DPM 3.1.60A1 The Runaway Brochure](#)
- [DPM 3.1.60A2 Missing Persons Investigative Guide](#)
- [DPM 3.3.35 Department Reporting Protocols](#)
- [Suzanne's Law](#)