



FACT SHEET

Delaware County Community Emergency Response Team Supplemental Training Series

INTRODUCTION TO WILDERNESS SEARCH & RESCUE

Section II - Lost Person Behavior

- SAR Team members need to understand certain behavior traits the Missing Persons (MP) have.
- Use that knowledge to predict MP's actions.
- Allocate resources that reflect those predictions.

Factors Specific to Lost Subject Behavior

- State of Health
- Past Experiences
- Physiological Effects of the Environment
- Biorhythmic Cycles

YOUNG CHILDREN 1 - 6 years of age

- Unaware of the concept of being lost.
- Navigational skills and sense of direction almost non-existent.
- Tend to wander aimlessly.
- Do not respond to whistles or calls.
- Good survivability because of tendency to find shelter.

YOUNG CHILDREN 7 - 12 years of age

- Navigational and directional skills are much more developed than that of 1 - 6 years olds.
- They are learning to construct primitive 'mental maps' of their environments which may be highly inaccurate.
- Frequently become lost while attempting a short cut to a familiar location.
- May become lost during fantasy play - adventuring etc., and may find the play and reality confusing.
- They may become upset and confused when lost and react irrationally.

YOUTH 13 - 15 years of age

- Navigational and directional skills are much more developed than 6 - 12 years olds.
- Frequently become lost in groups while engaged in exploring or adventure activity.
- They rarely travel far in groups.
- Will usually respond to calls and whistles.
- Often resort to 'direction sampling', looking for a familiar place or landmark.
- They may respond more maturely if with a friend or sibling.
- They will attempt to 'find themselves' though often lack adult tactics.
- May panic and resort to irrational tactics to locate themselves.

DESPONDENT

- It is not usually their intention to travel far, but to find a place where they can be alone and possibly contemplate suicide.
- Are frequently located at the interface of two types of terrain and/or vegetation boundary.
- Often head for a scenic location or well-known beauty spot such as a hill that may overlook civilization. Sometimes these places are well known to them.
- Rarely found in dense underbrush or trees.
- They rarely respond to calls and whistles and may even hide and avoid searchers.
- There is an extremely high fatality rate - drugs and/or alcohol are frequently involved.

SUICIDAL

- May be evasive and run away and/or hide. Most do not respond to name.
- Rarely travel purposefully to an identifiable target. Associated medication and/or lack of it may be a problem.
- May be frightened of authority and of being found. Can be aggressive - be aware of safety of searchers - seek advice.
- Rarely 'lost' in the traditional sense of the word. Behavior may be difficult to predict.

MRDD

- Blend of Young Children and Alzheimer's - lack concept of being 'lost'.
- Good survivability.
- Rarely respond.
- Possible associated physical impairment.
- Rarely travel to a set target though often make a random building to seek shelter.
- Will travel and penetrate into woods, forests and undergrowth.
- Subject may run away from and avoid searchers.

ALZHEIMERS

- Poor memory. Impaired ability to make sense of surroundings, and recognize hazards.
- May experience hallucinations or perceptual distortions.
- Possibly looking for a private location in which to urinate.
- Will not cry out for help or respond to shouts. Will not leave many physical clues.
- Usually succumbs to the environment (hypothermia, dehydration).



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MISCELLANEOUS ADULTS (16 & up)

- This category includes mushroom/fruit pickers, photographers, rock hounds and generally people engaged in some outdoor activity.
- Often inadequately equipped and prepared for activity or the circumstances they find themselves in.
- Many subjects found away from trails and tracks.
- May not have map and compass.
- Attempts to 'find themselves'
- Often exacerbate the situation.

HIKERS

- They are trail oriented and often become lost when their trail becomes obscured or when they encounter a confusing junction or intersection of trails.
- They tend to travel further than other categories.
- Sometimes poorly prepared and lack experience of remote areas.
- Will attempt to find themselves by trail running or finding high spot.
- May follow 'lines of least resistance' such as a stream, forest edge, etc.
- May look for shelter at nightfall or if injured.

HUNTERS

- Frequently become disoriented chasing wounded game into thick areas of trees or bush.
- They tend to overextend themselves in darkness and push beyond their physical abilities.
- Will respond to calls and whistles - may fire shots to attract searchers.
- May try to walk out unaided at daybreak after building shelter for the night.
- On average 1 in 3 walk out unharmed. High survivability rate.

Detectability

Child (7-12 years)

- 65% in good weather.
- 10% in bad weather. (will hide if weather foul)

Youth (13-15 years)

- 75% in good weather.
- 50% in bad weather. (will retreat if weather foul)
- High % are communicative.

Despondent

- Not responsive to searchers.
- Feel it is an intrusion upon their solitude.

Psychotics

- Not responsive to searchers.

Mentally Retarded

- Often deaf or hard of hearing.
- 59% in good weather.
- 10% in bad weather. (Difficulty in locating subjects, most found in prone position regardless of weather condition)

Alzheimer's

- 65% in good weather.
- 10% in bad weather.

Miscellaneous Adult

- 75% in good weather.
- 50% in bad weather. (will retreat if weather foul)
- High % are communicative.

Hikers

- 75% in good weather.
- 67% in bad weather.

Hunters

- 83% in good weather * Communicative.
- 66% in bad weather * Mobile.
- 17% wear dark clothing. (Detectability enhanced due to bright clothing)

Others

- 65% in good weather.
- 10% in bad weather.