



Position Statement

Standard for Public Safety Telecommunicators when Responding to Calls of Missing, Abducted, and Sexually Exploited Children, APCO ANS 1.101.2-2010

Submitted by the IAFC Communications Committee

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) adopts a position of support for the implementation of the Standard for Public Safety Telecommunicators when Responding to Calls of Missing, Abducted, and Sexually Exploited Children, APCO ANS 1.101.2-2010. This is a very effective tool to better ensure the safety of children in the United States and worldwide. The standard is a revised and updated version, produced with the input of public safety groups from the private and public sectors at the national, state, and local levels. The standard has been approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

Children are one of society's most vulnerable populations; therefore, taking every step possible to protect them is paramount. The danger which children are exposed to when they go missing is significant. The sheer volume of cases and the number of victims of these crimes make efforts of all public safety groups toward an improved response system not merely desirable, but imperative.

The startling numbers begin with the fact that 800,000 children go missing each year.¹ These are not just cases of runaway children on a playful escapade or taken by a family member without their parents' knowledge. 58,200 children were actually victims of non-family abductions.² The speed with which these cases can evolve into truly dreadful scenarios is terrifying. When children are abducted and murdered, 47% die within the first hour, 76% within three hours, and only 11.5% survive more than a day after abduction.³

¹ Andrea J. Sedlak, David Finkelhor, Heather Hammer, and Dana J. Shultz. National Estimates of Missing Children: An Overview, *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*, Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, October 2002, page 5.

² *Id.*, page 10.

³ Katherine N. Brown, Robert D. Keppel, Joseph G. Weis, and Marvin E. Skeen. *Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation*. Olympia, Washington: Office of the Attorney General, State of Washington and U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 2006, page 14.

Crimes related to missing children are therefore particularly difficult because of the vulnerability of their victims and time sensitivity. Some of the challenges in reporting and consequently responding in these situations are:

- Several types of missing children cases exist, including: non-family abductions, family abductions, runaways, throwaways, lost, injured or otherwise missing children. Each category requires a somewhat different and nuanced approach beginning with the telecommunicator.
- Many cases are resolved without the intervention of law enforcement. However, this points to the seriousness of cases in which the authorities are called to act. Decisive action prepared by pre-planning and training is critical to successful resolution.
- Given the large number of cases being reported that might not be critical, the response can be compromised from unqualified assumptions about the seriousness of the crime. These assumptions can put a child at risk.
- Coordination and the identification of the responsible agency in multijurisdictional regions pose serious obstacles. This is particularly true due to the time sensitivity of the cases.

Based on these difficulties, the International Association of Fire Chiefs endorses the APCO standard because of its usefulness in:

1. Guiding agencies to take immediate and necessary action for all reports of missing, abducted and sexually exploited children. Particularly in prescribing to hold the assumption that the child is to be considered at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.
2. Guiding the adopting agency to investigate reports when a child residing within its jurisdiction is reported missing in another jurisdiction where the case is not being investigated. The agency's responsibilities will include working closely with law enforcement in whose jurisdiction the child was last seen.
3. Clearly stating that in cases where parental custody has not been formally established the agency will accept the report of a missing child. The agency will request legal custody documentation from the reporting party; however, a case will be opened even when such documentation is not available immediately, because the safety of the child is paramount.
4. Providing a logical framework that systematically addresses all steps a telecommunicator must take to increase the chances of successful resolution of a case. The goals of the steps are to obtain and verify incident location, methodically and strategically obtain information through systematic inquiry to be captured in the agency's intake format, to recognize the potential urgency of the case, and to perform all information entries and disseminations.

ADOPTED BY: IAFC Board of Directors

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