

Public Alerts

317.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for alerting the public to important information and soliciting public aid when appropriate.

317.2 POLICY

Public alerts may be employed using the Emergency Alert System (EAS), local radio, television and press organizations and other groups to notify the public of incidents, or enlist the aid of the public, when the exchange of information may enhance the safety of the community. Various types of alerts may be available based upon each situation and the alert system's individual criteria.

317.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

317.3.1 MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Members of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office should notify their supervisor, Shift Commander or a Criminal Investigations supervisor as soon as practicable upon learning of a situation where public notification, a warning or enlisting the help of the media and the public could assist in locating a missing person, apprehending a dangerous person or gathering information.

317.3.2 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

A supervisor apprised of the need for a public alert is responsible to make the appropriate notifications based upon the circumstances of each situation. The supervisor shall promptly notify the Sheriff, the appropriate Division Commander and the Public Information Officer when any public alert is generated in accordance with SMCSO Policy 327 Major Incident Notification.

The supervisor overseeing the investigation to which the alert relates is responsible for the following:

- (a) Updating alerts
- (b) Canceling alerts
- (c) Ensuring all appropriate reports are completed

317.4 AMBER ALERT

The AMBER Alert™ Program is used to provide a statewide system for the rapid dissemination of information regarding abducted children.

317.4.1 CRITERIA

The following criteria are utilized to determine if an AMBER Alert should be issued:

- (a) There is confirmation that the child has been abducted.
- (b) The child is under the age of 18.

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- (c) The circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.
- (d) There is enough descriptive information about the child, abductor and/or suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert will help.
- (e) The child is believed to still be in the broadcast area.
- (f) The child's name and other critical elements have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).

317.4.2 PROCEDURE

After verifying a report that a child has been abducted and is in danger of serious bodily harm, the supervisor overseeing the investigation shall:

- (a) Immediately notify the Shift Commander.
- (b) After confirming that the AMBER Alert criteria have been met, a field supervisor shall contact the Maryland State Police (MSP) headquarters duty officer and request an AMBER Alert activation.
- (c) Provide all necessary information to the MSP Missing Child Recovery Unit.
- (d) Be prepared to follow up the verbal request with a written request made via fax to the MSP headquarters duty officer.

317.5 BLUE ALERT

The National Blue Alert System™ is used to provide a statewide system for the rapid dissemination of information regarding a violent criminal who has seriously injured or killed a local, state or federal law enforcement officer (Md. Code PS § 3-605).

317.5.1 CRITERIA

The following criteria are utilized to determine if a Blue Alert should be issued:

- (a) A deputy must have been killed or seriously injured by an offender.
- (b) It has been determined that the offender poses a serious risk or threat to the public and other law enforcement personnel.
- (c) A detailed description of the offender's vehicle, vehicle tag or partial tag must be available for broadcast to the public.
- (d) When an officer is missing in the line of duty.

317.5.2 PROCEDURE

The following are the procedures for a Blue Alert:

- (a) Upon confirmation of the Blue Alert criteria, a CID supervisor in charge of the investigation shall recommend activation of the Blue Alert to the MSP.
- (b) Once this office apprehends a missing offender who is the subject of a Blue Alert, a CID supervisor overseeing the investigation shall immediately notify the MSP and any

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law enforcement agency that filed the report resulting in the Blue Alert that the missing offender has been apprehended (Md. Code PS § 3-605).

317.6 SILVER ALERT

Silver Alerts are used to provide a statewide system for the rapid dissemination of information regarding a missing person who has a cognitive disorder (Md. Code PS § 3-604).

317.6.1 CRITERIA

The following criteria are utilized to determine if a Silver Alert should be issued:

- (a) The whereabouts of a person at least 60 years old is unknown.
- (b) The person suffers a cognitive impairment, including a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or dementia to the extent that the individual requires assistance from a caregiver.
- (c) The disappearance poses a credible threat to the health and safety of the person due to age, health, mental or physical disability, and environment or weather conditions, as determined by this office.
- (d) The person is traveling in a vehicle and there is enough descriptive information about the missing person and the vehicle to issue an alert.
- (e) The Office has already activated a local or regional alert by contacting media outlets in the jurisdiction and the missing person has been entered into NCIC.

317.6.2 PROCEDURE

The following are the procedures for a Silver Alert:

- (a) Upon confirmation of the Silver Alert criteria, a supervisor overseeing the investigation shall contact the MSP headquarters duty officer and request a Silver Alert.
- (b) Once the Office confirms that the missing person has been located, a supervisor overseeing the investigation shall notify the MSP that the missing person has been located.

317.7 YELLOW ALERT

Yellow Alerts are used to provide a statewide system for the rapid dissemination of information regarding a suspect in a hit-and-run involving serious injury or death (Md. Code PS § 3-606).

317.7.1 CRITERIA

The following criteria are utilized to determine if a Yellow Alert should be issued:

- (a) The whereabouts of a person suspected of leaving the scene of an accident involving serious bodily injury or death are unknown (Md. Code TR § 20-102).
- (b) The suspect's vehicle can be described, including any information about the vehicle's license plate number.

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317.7.2 PROCEDURE

The following are the procedures for a Yellow Alert:

- (a) Upon confirmation of the Yellow Alert criteria, the supervisor in charge of the investigation shall contact the MSP headquarters duty officer and request a Yellow Alert.
- (b) Once the Office confirms that the vehicle or suspect has been located, the supervisor in charge of the investigation shall notify the MSP.

317.8 LOCAL MEDIA ALERT

317.8.1 CRITERIA

A local media alert should be used for the rapid dissemination of information to assist in finding a missing person regardless of whether the criteria for a state alert are met.

317.8.2 PROCEDURE

Regardless of whether a public alert is activated, the following procedures to alert the media and other local law enforcement agencies should be followed:

- (a) The PIO will prepare an initial press release that includes all available information that might aid in locating a child, suspect or missing person, such as:
 1. The person's identity, age and description.
 2. A photograph, if available.
 3. Pertinent vehicle description.
 4. Details regarding the location of the incident, last known direction of travel and potential destinations, if known.
 5. The name and contact number of the PIO or other authorized media liaison.
 6. A contact number for the public to call with leads or information.
- (b) The press release should be disseminated to local television and radio stations.
- (c) The information in the press release should also be forwarded to local law enforcement agencies.
- (d) The activating official or other individual responsible for making notifications shall prepare and forward to the previously described locations, follow-up press releases with updates regarding the search and investigation, or immediately upon locating the person identified in the public alert.

The PIO is responsible for providing relevant updates to the supervisor of the deputy in charge of the investigation.

317.9 NIXLE

NIXLE delivers alerts and community news through text messaging, email or by the web. Citizens must register to receive information and choose the notification that best suits their needs.

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317.9.1 NIXLE USE

- (a) NIXLE Connect can be used to distribute information to a specific group, a geographically defined area or to all registered users. Whenever an alert of community notice is distributed, the alert or notice is always posted to the NIXLE website under the profile setup for the Office of the Sheriff.
- (b) The distribution of law enforcement related alerts and/or community news is restricted to supervisory personnel who have been trained in the proper use of the system and designated by their Division Commander to utilize the system for its intended purpose. Material distributed through the use of NIXLE will be consistent with the agencies policy governing the release of information.
- (c) Each Division Commander is responsible for managing the users they authorize to distribute information via the system, setting user profiles and ensuring users have received the required training before using the system to distribute alerts or community news.

317.9.2 NIXLE TRAINING

Prior to using NIXLE for the distribution of alerts and community news, each authorized user will review the online training videos distributed by NIXLE on their website.

317.10 PURPLE ALERT

Purple Alerts are used to provide a statewide system for the rapid dissemination of information regarding a missing person who has a hearing impairment or who has a cognitive impairment, mental disorder, intellectual or developmental disability, or a brain injury that is unrelated to Alzheimer's disease, dementia, or substance abuse (Md. Code PS § 3-608).

317.10.1 CRITERIA

The following criteria are utilized to determine if a Purple Alert should be issued:

- (a) The whereabouts of a person is unknown.
- (b) The person has either:
 - 1. A cognitive impairment, mental disorder, intellectual or developmental disability, or brain injury that is unrelated to Alzheimer's disease, dementia, or substance abuse.
 - 2. A hearing impairment (e.g., deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing).
- (c) The disappearance poses a credible threat to the health and safety of the person due to age, health, mental or physical disability, environment, or weather conditions, as determined by this office.
- (d) The person does not meet the criteria for the activation of a Silver Alert.
- (e) Any other criteria required by the MSP prior to issuing the Alert are met.

317.10.2 PROCEDURE

The following are the procedures for a Purple Alert:

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- (a) Upon confirmation of the Purple Alert criteria, the supervisor in charge of the investigation shall contact the MSP headquarters duty officer and request a Purple Alert.
- (b) Once the Office confirms that the missing person has been located, the supervisor in charge of the investigation shall notify the MSP that the missing person has been located.