

# Managing the Urban Missing Person Search



## Searching In the Urban Environment



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## A NEED FOR BOTH TRAINING AND URBAN SEARCH CAPABILITY

Search and rescue teams are finding themselves conducting an ever increasing number of searches in urban areas. This is in part due to the increasing demand being placed on the urban law enforcement agencies. It is also in part because of the fastest growing category of missing persons in SAR globally happens to be the dementia category. SAR teams are also conducting more urban training and at the same time, advertising their capabilities in response to a very real need for trained resources to search in urban environments. Without proper planning, this environment can quickly become a “*nightmare*” for searchers as well as Incident Commanders and overhead team members.

### OVERVIEW

Most people have a vague idea what the term “urban” means, but it is complex to precisely define it when it comes to search. On one end of the spectrum, there is “pure urban nonresidential,” with New York and other city centers being prime examples. Then there is “urban residential” where people in the city actually live. There is also the term “suburban” which can imply densely populated residential areas adjacent to an inner city. Suburban can also imply the urban/rural interface or transition zones on the edge of cities. For our purposes here “urban” will be used to describe urban and suburban areas set totally apart from what would be considered rural or wilderness areas.

**Suburban** – Moderately to heavily populated areas adjacent to a city and given mostly to housing intermixed with well-defined shopping districts. May include undeveloped open areas as well as woodlands and parks. Some suburban areas also contain industrial parks.

**Urban** – Heavily populated areas containing concentrations of residential, business, and industrial neighborhoods with a defined city center. May contain undeveloped or abandoned properties as well as parks and open spaces.

Most urban/suburban combination areas contain patches of rural vegetated terrain, such as heavy trees or forest, steep hills, rocky terrain near fast moving water, and even some open grassland. The consequence of this is that even in what ostensibly appears to be an urban area, searchers may need the skills associated with rural/wilderness searching to carry out their role and freely transition between terrain types and search modes. If searchers do not possess the skills to make the transition between terrain types, it is imperative that they are not deployed to any area in which they feel uncomfortable or in danger while searching.

A major problem encountered by these SAR teams is how to adapt typical wilderness strategy and tactics to urban searches. Problems such as having to work dogs in heavy traffic, searching trash dumpsters (*skips*) and the necessity to have police escorts in some portions of cities have led to a less than effective effort in many cases.

### Background and Planning

The urban environment is very complex. In addition to the natural places a person could be concealed, man-made hiding places abound. Every rubbish bin must be poked through, every crawl space checked out, every pipe or culvert thoroughly investigated. All of these must be searched and these tasks cannot be delegated to untrained people. Getting trained searchers to pick through a dumpster completely is enough of a struggle, but getting the average citizen to do it is next to impossible. Searching these areas is extremely difficult and time consuming. This complexity emphasizes the rule “**Don’t go there unless there is a very good reason.**”

Homeowners may or may not comply with a request for them to check their own property. It may be necessary to request permission for trained searchers to thoroughly check a home owner's property. This may include getting permission to unlock storage buildings, open crawl spaces, garages or even vehicles. People can become locked in as well as out.

Some areas are not safe, especially at night. Missing person cases are the responsibility of the jurisdiction's law enforcement agency. They should be involved in all search operations and provide escort when required. (*This is absolutely necessary for Searcher Safety.*) The negative effect of this involvement is that the SAR team member will be viewed as law enforcement. Search dogs, in many cases, can be viewed as drug dogs. Interviewing may be difficult at best, even if the missing person is from the neighborhood. There is an inherent mistrust of the police in many inner city areas around the world.

### **Search for Missing Persons in the Urban Environment Course**

The real value of this course lies in the experience base that was used in the development of the strategies and tactics advocated in the curriculum. The training is a well balanced mix of academic presentations and practical table-top map exercises. The prerequisite training for attendance on this course is having gone through the **Managing Land Search Operations – Basic** course.

The program relies on the most up-to-date training materials, videos, case studies and research documents combined with the experience & knowledge of the instructors & course participants. The learning environment is enhanced by the use of practical map exercises from real life incidents and the use of up-to-date computer technology online using participant computers. The exercises feature the option of different map problems that can be used depending on where the course is being conducted and the experience level of the participants. Multi-agency operations are emphasized, along with the use of volunteers and a myriad of external influences bearing upon any urban search operation.

The first half day of the course sets the stage (*rationale, legal requirements, SAR Preplanning for the Urban Environment*) and provides a foundation for subsequent resource, strategy and tactic discussions that follow. Preplanning issues are covered to include the components of a SAR vulnerability assessment and a practical preplan specific for urban and suburban areas. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Investigating the history and statistics of missing persons in the area
- Discovering who the "at-risk populations" are
- What facilities must be visited and incorporated in a pre-plan (nursing homes, day care centers, schools, etc.)
- What are the primary hazards and attractions in the local environment?
- What makes the urban environment so different and unique from rural search?
- What are the International data bases and research useful in the urban missing person search?

During the remainder of the course, participants are exposed to mixed academic classroom presentations on urban related strategy, tactics resources and map exercises based on real searches that have occurred in urban areas.

## Objectives

After successful completion of this training, participants will have been exposed to virtually all the basic tenets of searching for missing persons in the urban environment. They will have the foundational skills and knowledge necessary to respond and contribute effectively to an urban missing person search. Participants will be able to:

1. Apply “best practices” search management tenets and documentation paperwork in both urban and suburban environment practical map exercises.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the Incident Command System by implementing a basic ICS structure for first on-scene responders in an urban area search map exercise
3. Manage a search for a missing person in an urban or developed area within a city
4. Discuss the importance of the essential element “vulnerability assessment” to a written pre-plan for urban search
5. List the basic types of urban search resources, their functions and limitations
6. Demonstrate the ability to establish probable search areas & searchable subdivisions in an urban map exercise
7. Describe the most production/efficient tactics for suburban or urban environments
8. Describe the reflex tasking sequence from ISRID for applying resources to an urban search
9. Describe the fundamental differences between searching for missing persons in rural or wilderness areas compared to urban or suburban areas
10. Respond to a missing person incident and initiate priority actions as follows:
  - Obtain sufficient essential information for a complete initial report
  - Determine category of subject & possible behaviors that may affect strategy
  - Evaluate the need for an actual physical search as opposed to waiting (Search Urgency)
  - Determine appropriate resources and apply them in an urban setting
  - Organize and manage the initial search effort. (Reflex Tasks - optional strategy and tactics that will produce the greatest chances for success)
  - Effectively communicate to, and manage casual volunteers & family in an urban search

In addition, each participant will be able to assist his/her local team/organization or jurisdiction in the following areas:

1. Assist local SAR Responders (Incident Commanders) in developing response plans and protocols for all urban SAR operations. (i.e. Reflex tasks, etc.)
2. Provide assistance with necessary training to other agencies, personnel, and volunteers assigned to SAR operational duties for urban searching.
3. Assist in the development of “benchmarks” for local search and rescue teams for use during real operations. (*This is to say speed and timing details for searching specific types of areas like alleys, buildings, parks, back yards, etc.*)

# Urban Search

- Managing Missing Person Searches in the Urban Environment -

## Summary of Urban Search Subject Areas and Times

### Day One

1. Introductions, handout books, initial admin announcements..... 0.5 Hr  
**Pre-Operations, Preparedness and Planning**
2. Transitioning from Rural Search to the City Streets..... 1.5 Hrs  
What is the same? What is different? Planning for an Urban Search Incident  
– Vulnerability Assessment – Using Incident Command
3. Resources for the Urban Environment – Comparisons & Training .... 1.0 Hr
4. Legal Issues, Public Expectations ..... 1.0 Hr  
**Operational Response (Responding when the call comes in)**
5. Getting Started – Urgency – Gathering Information – Report Forms  
– Investigation & Interviewing ..... 1.25 Hr
6. Missing Person Behavior and Reflex Tasking – Urban Priority Categories..... 1.0 Hr
7. Case Study – Search for Mathew – Clovis New Mexico ..... 0.5 Hr
8. Map Exercise #1 – Hopewell – Veck Incident ..... 2.0 Hrs
9. Discussion & Summary ..... - End of Day One -

### Day Two

10. Urban Strategy – Search Theory in the City – Establishing the Search Area –  
Night Operations- Controlling the Search Area – Managing Casual Volunteers & Family  
– Dealing with the Media ..... 1.5 Hr
11. Urban Tactics – Initial Actions & Reflex Tasks – Fliers – Containment  
– Briefing & Debriefing – Searching Highways, Roads & Streets – House to House Searching  
– Building Search – Abduction, etc. .... 2.0 Hrs
12. Map Exercise #2 – Practical on Abduction - Chesterfield ..... 1.5 Hrs
13. Search Using the Online Social Network..... 1.0 Hr
14. Map Exercise #3 Glackin Search - Philadelphia ..... 2.5 Hrs
15. Critique, Closing Comments and Certificates ..... 0.5 Hr  
..... - End of Day Two -
- TOTAL ..... 17+ Hrs**

*Add or subtract 1 hour depending upon optional topics and instructional aides.*

## UNITS OF INSTRUCTION

### 1. Introduction, Course Administration, Class Objectives (0.5 Hr )

**Scope:** Welcome, familiarization with the facilities, administrative information, course purpose, objectives, agenda and instructional staff introduction. Class participants establish their primary objectives for attending the course and introduce themselves.

### 2. Transitioning from Rural Search to the City Streets (1.5 Hr )

**Scope:** What is different? What is the same? Planning for an urban search incident. This module gives a detailed explanation of how an urban incident is more complex and potentially more difficult than one conducted in a rural setting. Vulnerability assessment is emphasized for the written preplan and the rationale of why the Incident Command System will most likely be much more elaborate for urban operations.

### 3. Resources in the Urban Environment: (1 Hr )

**Scope:** Comparisons are made between traditional SAR resources and those used typically in the urban search operations with training being compared also. This module identifies the types and categories of Urban SAR resources and their functions, limitations, sources, training and availability. Tactical application or how those resources are applied in a practical sense to the field. The sequence of initial actions for applying resources in the city is outlined as appropriate to establishing strategy and tactics. Detection modes, search techniques, and an overview of search resource capability are also covered. The objective here is to give participants a broad based understanding of how and what resources should be used for urban search.

### 4. Legal Issues, and Public Expectations (1 Hr Classroom)

**Scope:** This module discusses the basic issues of liability in SAR response, elements used to prove liability, and the most common causes of lawsuits against emergency responders. Emphasis is placed on understanding the law with regard to trespass on private property, the process and how most lawsuits occur. Volunteer status, Necessity and the Good Samaritan laws are also reviewed. Strategies to avoid lawsuits by individuals and how to protect SAR organizations is also covered.

### 5. Getting Started on an Urban Search Incident (1 Hr- 15 minutes)

**Scope:** This module was designed to capsulize the GETTING STARTED PROCESS after the call comes in for a potential missing person in the city. As a potential search incident unfolds, all of these tasks must be completed: Initial contact with the reporting party; Gathering initial information on Report Forms; Evaluation of the problem; and initial investigation and interviewing. All the factors involved in determining the urgency of the situation and how these help to set the level and speed of response is discussed. The minimum information needed by searchers to effectively search in the field is covered and a thorough look at the Initial and Full Missing Person Report form contents is covered.

## **6. Missing Person Behavior – Urban Priority Categories (1 Hr Classroom)**

**Scope:** This module describes Lost Person Behavior and how the resource data from ISRID (*International Search and Rescue Incident Database*) can be effectively used on a missing person urban search to establish both strategy and tactics. Categories of subject that are different from dementia and specific to the urban environment are discussed. Particularly the most common or priority categories for city environments. Reflex tasks are reviewed and described using the "Bike Wheel Model" for on-scene initial response.

## **7. Case Study – Search for Mathew – Clovis New Mexico (.5 Hr)**

**Scope:** This case was chosen because of both its complexities, and the uniqueness of searching in the city. Although this incident took place a number of years ago, it was well documented and provides a rationale for why this course was developed and points out the difficulties that can occur during an urban search. In general, everyone wants to avoid mistakes and learn from the experiences of others. While the case ended sadly with the missing child being found dead, it took considerable effort and time to solve the mystery. The lack of correct information about lost person behavior and correct strategy and tactics were key in this incident.

## **8. Map Exercise #1 - Hopewell – Veck Incident (2 Hr Practical Map Exercise)**

**Scope:** Practical map exercise which is based on an actual incident that occurred in Virginia. This initial map problem utilizes all of the basic principles introduced in the course to this point. Participants must use the same resources that were available during the actual incident. Interviewing and investigation are emphasized to gather planning data and searching data along with missing and lost person behavior. Participants are also given ground rules for participation in the tabletop map exercises to follow.

## **9. Discussion – Questions – Summary for the day (.5 Hr )**

**Scope:** Wrap up of the day's activities plus questions and/or discussion.

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## **Day Two**

## **10. Urban Strategy (1.0 Hr)**

**Scope:** This module emphasizes the strategies that must be in place for successful operations in the urban environment. Strategies get searchers and other resources into the field appropriately to find the missing person. Using search theory in the city is covered but difficulties in using it are explained. The unique aspects of establishing the search area in urban settings is described with examples along with basic guidelines for determining identifiable, practical boundaries and controlling the area for non-searchers. The importance of conducting night operations is discussed with appropriate safety considerations and shortfalls for using some protocols. Finally, guidelines are provided for managing casual volunteers and family members in a productive, but rationale manner. Protocols for dealing with the media and other external influences is also covered as a priority strategy.

## **11. Urban Tactics (2 Hrs)**

**Scope:** This module covers a myriad of very specific search tactics that have produced success in past urban search incidents. Type I, II, and III tactics are covered as a review from the Basic MLSO course. Initial response Reflex Tasking is reviewed along with the documentation paperwork and special emphasis on the preparation of missing person fliers and establishing containment in the city. Briefing and debriefing are covered with a focus on what kind of detail needs to be emphasized in the city. The specifics of searching highways, roadways, alleyways, backyards, buildings and storage facilities are described in detail with an emphasis on benchmark timing as a very real need for actual search operation planning. Map management, pre-designated search base sites, searcher safety, and good investigative techniques for specific types of people are all covered in detail. Making house to house inquiries and searching buildings are both outlined and diagrammed. The last portion of this module deals with abduction and international data that provides guidelines in these type incidents.

## **12. Map Exercise # 2 - Practical Problem on Abduction – Chesterfield, Virginia (1.5hrs)**

**Scope:** Practical map exercise which is based on an actual abduction incident that occurred on the east coast. This map problem utilizes the basic principles outlined in the tactics portion of the course. Participants must use the same resources that were available during the actual incident. Interviewing and investigation are emphasized for incident planning and participants must access national and international missing person databases to solve the exercise problem.

## **13. Using Social Media in a Missing Person Search (1 Hr)**

**Scope:** Ninety percent of the U.S. Population is online and there are over 65 billion page views on Facebook every month. The use of Social Media is pervasive throughout the world and seems to be growing steadily. This module reviews and defines the various forms of social media available to the population all across the U.S. and even around the world. This is a vital new tool in the search investigator's toolbox of options. Each media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) is explained and the specific audience and purpose for accessing that media is outlined. The rationale for accessing this source in a search for a missing person is discussed and outlined with clear cut examples. Both the history of social media and the types of information available are explored. The specifics of what to look for and access protocols are covered.

## **14. Map Exercise #3 Glackin Search – Philadelphia Dementia Category (2.5 Hrs)**

**Scope:** This is a very complex and challenging map exercise in a very big city on the east coast. This map exercise utilizes all of the basic principles introduced in the course to this point. Participants must use the same resources that were available during the actual incident. Interviewing and investigation are emphasized for incident planning and participants must access missing/lost person databases as well as reflex tasking group guidelines. Participants are encouraged to use their own computers, Google online with street views and maps for additional clarity on the exercise.

## **15. Critique, Closing Comments and Certificates (0.5 hr)**

**Scope:** Participants get a chance to compose a written critique of the course, the instructors and the venue. These critiques are available to all client agencies and organizations.

## Managing the Missing Person Search in the Urban Environment Agenda

**The course must have a tentative, flexible agenda based on local needs & tangent discussion topics**

Times for each module are approximate and vary with location and course participant needs.

Depending on start times, modify time hacks as appropriate; Times for each module are approximate.

**DAY 1:**

**INSTRUCTOR**

0800 to 0830	Introductions, Handout text, initial Admin.	_____
	<b>Pre-Operations Preparedness and Planning</b>	
-90 min	Transitioning from Rural Search to the City Streets	_____
	What is different? What is the same? Planning for Urban Search	_____
55 min	Resources in the Urban Environment – Comparisons - Training	_____
55 min	Legal Issues, Public Expectations	_____
	<b>Operational Response</b> ( <i>Responding when the call comes in</i> )	
1000 -1015	<b>Break</b> (coffee/tea)	
75 min	Getting Started ( <i>Urgency, gathering information, Report forms, Investigation and interviewing</i> )	_____
55 min	Missing Person Behavior and Reflex Tasking	_____
	<b>Lunch</b>	
1215-1315		
30min	Case Study – Search for Mathew – <i>Clovis New Mexico</i>	_____
120 min	Map Exercise #1 – Hopewell, Virginia – <i>Veck Incident</i>	_____
30 min	Discussion and Summary for the day	_____
1700	End of Class day	_____
	<b>End of Day 1</b>	

**DAY 2:**

0800 -	Class Starts	
0800 - 1000		
55 min	Urban Strategy - ( <i>Search Theory in the City, Establishing the Search Area, Night Operations, Controlling the Search Area, Managing the Casual Volunteer and Family, Dealing with External Influences like the Media</i> )	_____
120 min	Urban Tactics – ( <i>Initial Actions &amp; Reflex Tasks, Fliers, Containment, Briefing &amp; Debriefing, Searching Highways, Roadways, Streets, Alleyways, Buildings, House to House Search &amp; Abduction</i> )	_____
1000 -1015	<b>Break</b> (coffee/tea)	
90 min	Map Exercise #2 – Practical on Abduction – <i>Chesterfield, Va.</i>	_____
55 min	Search Using the Online Social Network	_____
	<b>Lunch</b>	
1315 -1415		
1415 – 1800		
150 min	Map Exercise #3 – Glackin Search – <i>Philadelphia Dementia Case</i>	_____
30 min	Critique Closing Comments and Certificates	_____
1700 -	<b>Class ends for 2nd day</b>	
	<b>End of Day 2</b>	

## EVALUATION

There should be some feedback and evaluation on the course utility and practical value at the end of the course. The feedback should consist of measuring objectives by various methods and techniques outlined in the lesson plans and in the end-of-course critique. Some law enforcement academies prefer a written test as evaluation which ERI can supply on request. The map problems serve as one of the best indicators for participant understanding of essential planning and management concepts.

## DEPLOYMENT

The **Managing Land Search Operations - Basic** course should be taken sometime in the first year of assignment for newly designated local SAR coordinators and Search Incident Commanders. This exposure will provide a clear template and knowledge for managing Type 5, 4 or 3 SAR incidents. This is particularly appropriate for managing these type incidents in the Urban Environment. That is why the MLSO Basic is a required prerequisite for the Urban Missing Person Search Course. The MLSO Basic provides a foundation of knowledge and terminology required to supervise or manage both the initial response operations and the formal search planning function on a protracted search in either rural or urban environments.

### QUALIFICATIONS FOR ATTENDING THE URBAN MISSING PERSON SEARCH COURSE:

As stated above, ERI designed this course for those who have assumed the responsibilities (*by volunteering or through paid professional positions*) to prepare for and respond to missing person searches in urban environments. This may include:

- New volunteer SAR personnel from any local SAR organization,
- New personnel from law enforcement agencies,
- Fire/rescue service personnel,
- Emergency medical group members,
- Utility agency employees that may be called upon as a resource,
- Anyone wishing to participate as a SAR emergency responder during urban missing person incidents.

As already stated above, the prerequisite training for attendance on this course is the **Managing Land Search Operations Course – Basic**. The instructor staff will assume participants have little or no background in the areas covered by this course.

**SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:** During the map exercise portions of this training, class participants will need to have access to the internet while in the classroom being used for the training. Participants will break up into small working groups and will be asked to access the net during the map exercises for a number of assignments. They will be instructed on how to use both the social media for search as well as Google maps and street views for practical use on the map exercises.

Specific competencies, knowledge and practical skills introduced in this training course need continuing reinforcement for student retention. Evaluations and/or critiques filled out by the participants will serve the following purposes: to evaluate participant comprehension of concepts; to determine the need for revisions in future courses; and to determine the scope of future follow-on refresher courses. **Managing the Urban Missing Person Search** course should be attended within at least 6 months of going through the **MLSO Basic** and should be followed up with a refresher at a minimum of every three years. This is particularly important for those that have the responsibility to supervise longer more complicated search operations.

**MATERIALS CHECKLIST:**  
**Urban Search – Managing the Missing Person**  
**Search in the Urban Environment**

**STUDENT TEXT**

**Required:** Text – Urban Search: Managing Missing Person Searches in the Urban Environment  
**by Christopher S. Young & John Wehbring**

**Required for Instructors:** Lost Person Behavior – A Search and Rescue Guide on  
Where to Look – for Land, Air and Water **by Robert J. Koester**

**Optional:** ICS Field Operations Guide for Search and Rescue **by Robert J. Koester**

**Optional:** Selected papers from research studies

**STUDENT MATERIALS**

Student pre-work or assignments (*Train the trainer courses usually have pre-work*)

3-ring notebooks or tablets for taking notes (*if necessary*)

Name tent for each participant (*pass around marker to write names*)

Course critique forms

Certificates

**INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS**

Laminated maps for use in tabletop exercises

Vinyl overlays for operational period designations

Embedded videos and case studies on CD

**CLASSROOM FACILITIES**

Blackboard, chalk and eraser

Flipchart and felt tip markers

Podium or instructor table at front of classroom

Reference tables for handouts, journals, research materials and example texts, etc. (*two*)

Student seating - Desks? Tables with chairs work out much better

Separate work or breakout areas for students to work exercises/problems

Separate work-table for instructors (layout and organize instructional materials)

Room that can be secured for storage and access to a copy machine

3-hole punch for students to keep handouts and extra worksheets

**AV EQUIPMENT**

Overhead projector if available to assist with the map exercises for assignments

Computer projector

Extra bulbs and extension cord

Sources of immediate back-up equipment

Screen (*as large as possible*); realistically this should be at least 6 X 8 feet.

**MISCELLANEOUS ADMIN. MATERIALS**

Receipt book if necessary for registrations

Paper, pens or pencils & tape (*masking tape to hold down vinyl overlays*)

Extra transparencies (vinyl) & water soluble pens

Emergency Response International contact Information:

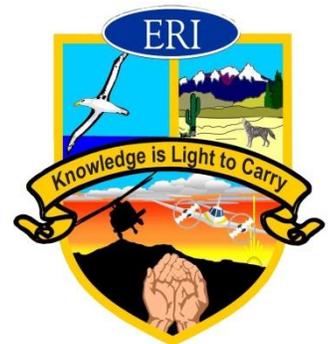


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