



Search and rescue teams reach out with new tool



Alaska Search and Rescue Association President Corey Aist (KTUU-TV)

by Leyla Santiago
Sunday, June 22, 2008

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- Alaska Police received multiple missing person reports this week. For some of them, they used a program offered to help find missing persons.

But that program relies on the general public's help through automated phone calls.

The program, known as A Child is Missing, is used by police forces across the U.S. and has helped return 335 people to their loved ones so far.

"This week has been a very busy week for search and rescue volunteers, especially in Anchorage," Alaska Search and Rescue Association President Corey Aist said.

Volunteer Danny Brown says he's used to the sporadic phone calls.

"We get called at odd hours either in the middle of the night or snowing out or on weekends or birthday parties," he said.

As part of a Child is Missing, automated phone calls are sent to a section of residents from the Anchorage Police Department when a person goes missing.

"A Child is Missing is a free program that's run out of Florida," Anchorage Police Department Spokesman Lt. Paul Honeman said. "They have their own database and phone bank and call, autodial a segment of town upon our request."

Police can request the service if a child is abducted or wanders off or if the case involves an elderly with Alzheimer's, a first time runaway or a mentally handicapped person.

The system is set up to automatically call neighbors in the area and can reach up to 1,000 people in just one minute.

"It's focused more and centered more on those who are endangered," Lt. Honeman said.

Police say in a search and rescue situation, the first two hours are crucial.

A Child is Missing is a way for them to cut down on money and time.

"Of course people don't want to get woke up by somebody knocking on their door," Brown said. "The telephone call is a lot easier."



Police say in a search and rescue situation, the first two hours are crucial. (KTUU-TV)



Search and rescue volunteer Danny Brown (Zac Gooch/KTUU-TV)



Anchorage Police Department Spokesman Lt. Paul Honeman (Zac Gooch/KTUU-TV)

Residents who get the phone call are simply asked to be more alert. They are asked to check out their window, in sheds or other buildings that may be on their property, under cars and in the streets and areas surrounding their homes.

The call is designed mainly to create awareness and pick up an extra set of eyes.

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