



Predicting Lost Person Behavior

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Objectives

- Explain the relevance of lost person behavior to search planning.
- Identify those lost person behavior factors that should be considered in search planning.
- Describe common reactions to the experience of being lost.
- Describe some common types or categories of lost persons.

Questions Related to Lost Person Behavior

- How far can someone like this travel?
- How large an area should we search?
- Where should we try to confine the subject?
- How thoroughly should we search?
- What kind of clues should we be looking for?
- How difficult will it be to detect this person?
- Is it time to suspend the search?

Factors to Consider

- General state of health.
- Past experience.
- Effects of the environment.
- Circumstances under which the person became missing.
 - Equipment
 - State of mind
 - Unusual events

Reactions to Becoming Lost

- Shock and disbelief
- Irrational or fearful thoughts
- Embarrassment
- Feeling of urgency to find familiar surroundings

Behavior While Lost

- Failure to make shelter or a fire
- Discarding equipment
- Disrobing
- Failure to respond to searchers
- Failure to utilize travel aids

Lost Person Strategies for Getting "Unlost"

- Trail running.
- Travel a straight line.
- Direction sampling.
- View enhancement.
- Employing folk wisdom.
- Staying put.

Six Lost Person Categories

- Small Children (1 to 6 years)
- Children (6-12 years)
- Hunters
- Hikers
- Elderly (over 65)
- Miscellaneous adults
 - Berry pickers, photographers, bird watchers, other outdoor enthusiasts

Children (1 to 3 years)

- Unaware of the concept of being "lost".
- Wander aimlessly.
- Seek out most convenient location to lie down.
- Very difficult to detect.
- Seek shelter in poor weather.

Children (4 to 6 years)

- Travel farther than younger children.
- Try to return to some familiar place.
- Drawn away by animals, or just exploring.
- Seek shelter at night and in bad weather
- Avoid strangers.

Children (7 to 12 years)

- Construct "Mental maps" of their environment.
- Often become lost taking a short cut to a familiar location.
- Become upset and confused when lost.
- Frequently resort to "trail running".
- May act more maturely if accompanied by friend or sibling.

Youth (13-15 years)

- Frequently become lost in group of two or more.
- When in groups rarely travel far.
- Usually respond to searcher's calls.
- Often resort to *direction sampling* looking for some familiar place or landmark.

Hunters

- Concentrate on game and not navigation.
- Tend to overexert themselves into darkness.
- Detectability?
- Usually respond/signal to searchers.
- May go to great lengths to walk out of the woods unassisted.
- The “typical” hunter will attempt to build shelter and walk out at daybreak.

Fishermen

- Shore fishermen become lost traveling to or from their fishing site.
- Boat fishermen become lost trying find a spot to launch their boat or land after dark in some unfamiliar location.
- Drowning is more a possibility for boat fishermen than for shore fishermen especially if alcohol is involved.

Hikers

- Trail-oriented, become lost by obscured trails or confusing intersecting paths.
- Tend to travel great distances using trails.
- Often less prepared and “woods-wise” than hunters and fishermen.

Skiers

- Mostly young and in fairly good physical condition.
- Usually well equipped.
- Most become lost because they took the wrong route, or misjudged time and distance.
- May be made immobile by injury and may be vulnerable to hypothermia.
- Usually highly detectable against the snow.

Climbers

- Usually are well equipped and self sufficient.
- Tend to remain on or near designated route.
- A common factor for missing climbers is weather or hazardous conditions which limit their capabilities.
- Falling debris and avalanches are often important factors.

Miscellaneous

...berry pickers, nature photographers , rock hounds

- Many are inadequately equipped or clothed.
- Frequently found near natural boundaries, such as rivers and lakes shores.
- Many found away from trails, depending on the nature of the activity in which they had been involved.

Despondents

- Usually do not travel far, but find a place to be alone and possibility contemplate suicide.
- Frequently located at the interface between two types of terrain, and sometimes a scenic location.
- Often avoid or hide from search teams.
- Despondents rarely protect themselves from the weather, drugs or alcohol may be involved.

Walkaways

- Rarely understand that they are lost.
- Seldom are dressed appropriately
- Rarely respond to and often hide from searchers.
- May be attempting to return to a place they enjoyed being.
- The fatality rate for subjects in this category is extremely high.

Other Lost Person Considerations

- Gender Differences
- Multiple-Subject Searches
- The Elderly Lost Person
- The Bogus Search

Overview of Lost Adults

- Usually search for paths rather than places.
- Seldom bushwhack.
- Usually stay on trail.
- May climb a hill to improve view.
- Rarely travel in straight line.
- Rarely reverse direction.
- May apply "woods wisdom".

Overview of Lost Children

- Have poor “mental maps” of surroundings.
- Search for familiar places rather than routes.
- Poor judges of direction and distance.
- Often become lost taking a “short cut”.
- Will often try “trail running”.
- May move randomly or unsystematically.
- Rarely answer searchers calling their names.

Preventive SAR (PSAR)

- Hug-a-Tree
- Find a Place Show Your Face
- Map & compass included in hunter safety programs
- Project Lifesaver (www.projectlifesaver.org)

Remember:

“The most successful lost person incident is the one you don’t have to conduct!”

Thank You



Questions?