



Press Release

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State Launches M.I.P.A. - Missing Indigenous Person Alert System

Olympia, WA - On Friday, July 1, 2022, the Washington State Patrol (WSP) will launch M.I.P.A. – the Missing Indigenous Person Alert System. Working with tribal law enforcement, municipal and federal law enforcement, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and other state agencies, as well as cable systems and state broadcasters, WSP’s Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit (MUPU) will add the specific designation of Missing Indigenous Persons to the Endangered Missing Alerts Systems already in place. Those include: AMBER Alerts highlighting missing children, SILVER Alerts highlighting missing seniors, and ENDANGERED MISSING PERSON Alerts highlighting missing adults.

“This is a significant step for our state and agency,” said MUPU director Carrie Gordon. “We know that indigenous people go missing at a significantly higher rate than the general population. WSP currently has two full time tribal liaisons that work with tribal law enforcement and advocacy groups to coordinate state communications and response to this issue. The new M.I.P.A. system will be one more tool in rapid response by the state that will hopefully allow us to find and assist indigenous people who are in danger.” Ms. Gordon added, “Hopefully, like our other alerts, the system will not be needed very often. But when it is needed and used, we feel it can be a very helpful tool in recovery.”

Not every missing person qualifies for the various missing persons alerts in the system. If a person can return on their own but chooses not to, and/or there are no indicators of foul play, and/or there is inadequate identifying information to make the alert viable, some situations may not qualify for inclusion. The criteria for the system to be activated:

- An indigenous person is missing due to unexplained, involuntary, or suspicious circumstances and/or is believed to be in danger because of age, health, adverse weather, or other circumstances and is believed to be unable to return to safety without assistance.
- There is enough descriptive information available that could reasonably assist with the safe recovery of the person such as: photos, height, weight, age, hair color, distinguishing physical characteristics, clothing, etc.
- The incident has been reported to and is being investigated by law enforcement.

If there is a vehicle associated with the disappearance, the information on make, model, color, license plate number, etc. will allow WSDOT’s regional Transportation Management Centers to use electronic highway signs, also called

Variable Message Signs, and the Highway Advisory Radio system to publicize the information. The Variable Message Signs are important tools in many recoveries but alerts are only placed on them if a known vehicle is involved so not every alert issued by WSP will be posted on highway signs or on the highway radio alert system.

Once an M.I.P.A. is activated, all Washington law enforcement will be notified electronically and MUPU will distribute the information via email and fax to a list of subscribers. (To subscribe to the email, [click here](#), scroll to the bottom of the page and subscribe.) The investigating agency will notify the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children if the missing person is 21 years old or under. WSDOT will begin displaying known vehicle information on the Variable Message Signs and Highway Advisory Radios in appropriate areas. In addition, cable and local broadcasters will be alerted and have the information for appropriate distribution to their audiences.

“We are very appreciative of the leadership, assistance, and support of the state’s legislature on this matter. Their allocation of the funds needed for both the technical and personnel costs associated with expanding our missing person alert systems has made this Missing Indigenous Person Alert system possible. It is the first like it in the United States and we are hopeful it will be a powerful tool in location and recovery efforts,” stated WSP Chief John R. Batiste.

The new alert system will be activated at 12:00 a.m. on Friday, July 1st.

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