Chapter 1. Introduction

In any urban setting around the world at any given time of the day there is a report of a missing person.

Consider the following scenarios:

Scenario One

You are the Watch Commander for the Police Department. It is 8:30 p.m. and you just received a report from the dispatcher saying they have a missing eleven-year-old female, Stacy Costa, who has been missing since 2:00 p.m. The initial investigation reveals that after school, Stacy called her mother at work and told her she was going on her bicycle to a friend's house three blocks away. When her mother got home after work at about 6:30 p.m., Stacy was not there. After calling the friend's house, as well as other neighbors and friends, and then driving around the neighborhood, her mother called the police at about 8:30 p.m. There is no history of the child missing before or running away from home. She likes to frequent a local shopping center, especially the arcade game area. She rides her bike around the neighborhood a lot and takes the municipal bus regularly to visit her father, who lives across town.

Scenario Two

You are the Search and Rescue Coordinator for the County. Dispatch received a call from the City of Martinez Police Department, saying that Walter Czar, an 83-year-old male with a history of stroke and dementia, has been reported missing by his care facility. Walter was last seen about 3:30 p.m. sitting in the garden of Sunny Care Home. One of the attendants of the facility went looking for Walter to give him his afternoon medication and could not find him. The administration checked the entire facility and the streets of the suburban neighborhood surrounding the care facility and turned up nothing. It is now 7:00 p.m. and getting dark.

Questions:

- Is each missing person actually lost or just avoiding the caregiver? How urgent is the search?
- What resources would you use to conduct the search, e.g., who or what would you use?
- Where do you start searching?
- How would you search?
- Would you search at night?
- How long would you search before asking for more help?
- Do you even need to start a search?

These scenarios are typical examples of search missions conducted by search teams around the world. While the scenarios are not out of the ordinary, the theater in which they are staged is not the remote wilderness that people typically think of when they hear of a missing person. Rather they have taken place in the heavily populated and extensively developed stage set of the modern city. Locating someone in these urban areas can be daunting to the agency responsible for finding them. A system is needed. That's where this book comes in.

The reader of this book is either curious about how to go about finding lost people in the city or wants to do the finding. When someone becomes lost, members of the community have a compelling need to help. People who volunteer on search and rescue missions may do so for a number of reasons, but the primary reason is usually to satisfy that need to help someone who is most likely confused, in trouble and needs assistance. Maybe we do it for compassion, to bring closure, or to right what we perceive as a wrong. In any case, finding the lost person isn't always easy, especially in the vast, busy, and confusing infrastructure of our cities and towns where all kinds of hazards exist and the sheer number of people makes it hard to pick out the lost person from the crowd. The need for special procedures and techniques to find that person in the urban environment is the impetus for this book.

The Need for this Book

Most of the world's population lives and works in cities. In 1910, 40% of the United States population lived in urban areas and 60% in rural areas. By 1990, in the United States, the urban population was up to 75%, and in 2000, the count rose again to 79%. As more people move to the city, the possibility of missing person reports increases. Estimates of the number of people missing

range widely. For example, the State of California Department of Justice averages over 100,000 missing person reports a year. Most of these are in urban areas and are resolved at almost the same time as they are reported. However, there are many reports that take longer to close or are still open.

People go missing all the time, but they are usually found by friends or relatives, or they return on their own; this is termed "self-rescue." A young child wanders away from his mother at a store. A teenager does not return home when expected. An adult doesn't show up for work. All of these are potentially serious incidents., but they frequently resolve themselves without intervention beyond the immediate family, friends or neighbors. But what happens when the person doesn't return on his own and cannot be found by family, friends or neighbors? The public then calls law enforcement.

The task of searching for missing persons in urban areas usually falls to the local law enforcement agency, although this varies by state and city. Most city police departments have protocols for responding to missing person incidents and that response may include some basic search procedures. When the initial search is not successful and must be expanded, the police department may not have the knowledge, experience or resources to conduct a systematic, thorough area search. Some cities call in local wilderness search teams who know these search procedures. However, these wilderness search teams discover that simply using a wilderness tactic is not appropriate for the urban environment. Both the police and the professional search teams have the best interests of the missing person at heart. Their efforts can be enhanced if they are able to call on search techniques especially designed for the urban environment, which are described in this book

What is "Urban Search"?

"Urban search," as used in this book, refers to the process of finding someone who is reported missing in the urban environment. Before the term "urban environment" is defined, however, it is necessary to differentiate "urban search" from what is commonly known in the United States and Canada as "urban search and rescue."

Searches for missing people in cities have been conducted for years and until recently there has been a need to differentiate them from searches conducted in the wilderness environment. In the 1980s the United States government, under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), became involved in disaster work. FEMA established local Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams and coined the term "urban search and rescue," which

meant activities associated with finding and rescuing people who were affected by major, widespread disasters. USAR teams were then called to assist local agencies in disasters, such as earthquakes. Currently, most USAR teams are associated with a fire service. The environment in which these searches typically take place is a collapsed building; thus "urban search and rescue" can be considered shorthand for looking for and evacuating people trapped in collapsed buildings. One could more broadly define the urban search and rescue environment as any major structural disaster. (The Hurricane Katrina disaster of August 2005 added flood search and rescue to the mission of USAR teams, however their primary function is still building search and rescue.)

In this book, however, the term "urban search" is used to represent the ordinary, everyday search for a missing person in any of the areas included within the definition of urban environment. "Urban search and rescue" as defined here involves the unknown and requires further investigation. Urban rescue techniques are not discussed in this book because they are already well developed by local emergency agencies, particularly fire departments. When a missing person is found who needs to be rescued, the appropriate agency is called. This book, therefore, focuses on searching in the urban environment, or simply "urban search."

Who Is in Charge?

In most areas of the United States and Canada, it is the local law enforcement agency's jurisdiction and responsibility to conduct the urban search; however, other governmental agencies may be in charge, depending on state laws and local protocols. In this book, the assumption is that the search function is delegated to the city police department, the county sheriff's department, or to another appropriate law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the search area. Local laws or statutes dictate who has jurisdictional authority to oversee search and rescue activities with a given area. The term used in search and rescue for this entity is "responsible agency."