

Wandering and Dementia

Tips for Police

Alzheimer *Society*
BRITISH COLUMBIA

This booklet contains information that can help police in their search for someone with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia.

Alzheimer *Society*
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Search for someone with dementia is an emergency. Do not delay!

1-800-667-3742

www.alzheimerbc.org

July 2010

Wandering and Alzheimer's/ Dementia

- Search for someone with dementia is an emergency!
- People with Alzheimer's disease have a 50% chance of being injured or dying from exposure, hypothermia, or drowning if they are not found within 12 hours.
- They are often not aware that they are lost.
- They often walk in a straight line until they become stuck, therefore it's helpful to know which door the person exited.
- They will not walk out of a wooded area.
- People with Alzheimer's will go straight across fields, creeks, climb over obstructions and through construction areas, etc. rather than selecting the path of least resistance, such as a road.
- They may be in a heightened state of anxiety and are often fearful of the people who are searching for them.
- They tend to be hidden and often do not call out for help or respond when their name is called.
- It is usually better for searchers to stay quiet and listen for auditory cues such as singing or whimpering.
- They often end up in a secluded spot hidden by brush or other cover.
- Their path may not be a logical one – searchers should resist the temptation to plot a search based on logical deduction.
- Even if the person is going somewhere specific like a former residence, they often do not follow a logical path.
- Most common places where people with Alzheimer's are found:
 - Creeks and drainage areas
 - Caught in briars or bushes
 - 90% will be found within one mile of the place they left

Communication Strategies

- People with dementia may be confused, irritable, frightened.
- They may be unable to communicate or understand what is being said.
- Approach the person from the front.
- Move slowly; establish and maintain eye contact
- Remove your cap
- Identify yourself (e.g. "I am a police officer here to help you get home")
- Address the person by name; speak slowly and clearly.
- Present one idea at a time.
- Establish a calm, caring atmosphere.
- Repeat/rephrase responses to clarify what he/she is trying to tell you.
- Ask questions requiring "yes" or "no" and allow time for a response.
- Back up your words with actions – using gestures.
- Listen actively and acknowledge the person's emotional state.
- Touching too roughly and quickly could cause increased stress.
- When reuniting the person with his/her family and/or caregivers, ensure that everyone is calm and able to deal with the situation before you leave.

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

1-800-667-3742

www.alzheimerbc.org