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Madison County announces child abduction response team

By Lisa Watson

Tuesday, May 25, 2010



The Madison County Sheriff's Office announced Tuesday that it is forming a team to respond to child abductions.



By Lisa Watson

Madison County Sheriff Bob Hertz

Madison County Sheriff Bob Hertz said he hopes the Madison County Child Abduction Response Team, or C.A.R.T., will be nationally certified by the end of 2010.

"There is nothing more traumatic for a society than the abduction and harming of one of its children," Hertz said.

The department sent 12 individuals to a training session in St. Louis last week, which is the first step in building a partnership with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Hertz said. The trainees came from law enforcement, education and child advocacy groups.

He said that although there had not been a "stranger abduction" in Madison County in his memory, such abductions happen throughout the country and it is only a matter time before one happens locally. The response team is being formed in case of such a situation.

"It's like buying a fire truck," Hertz said. "You buy a fire truck, you put it in the garage, and you hope you never have to use it."

There is only one other certified child abduction unit in Illinois, and Hertz said the nearest one to St. Louis in Missouri is in Springfield. Hertz said his office would share its services with surrounding communities in the Metro East as needed.

As the department builds its program, it will seek about 300 civilian volunteers who can be available for search efforts should an abduction occur. To be qualified, volunteers would need to be adults who are physically able, have good eyesight and can pass a background check.

"I feel pretty comfortable that within an hour's time we could get 300 boots on the ground," Hertz said. He added that time is always of the essence when a child is missing.

The volunteers would serve as extra eyes if a child goes missing in an open area, Hertz said. They would not be used if law enforcement had reason to believe a child was being held by a violent individual, or if the child was kidnapped by a family member.

The volunteers will be given instructions on where to meet if there is a missing child, and trained in how to search without disturbing possible evidence, Hertz said.

Hertz said it is important to teach children and adults to be on the lookout for possible kidnapers, but that is not always effective.

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“One of these days in Madison County all the proactive stuff is going to fail,” he said. “That’s where the reactive situation comes into play.”

Tuesday, May 25, was National Missing Children’s Day.

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