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Use Of The Roco Alert System For An Endangered Missing Person

(Roanoke County, VA) – Roanoke County Police this morning made an unusual emergency request for citizens' assistance for a search.

On January 7, 2014, at approximately 3:00am, Roanoke County Police responded to a report of a missing elderly male from a residence on Montgomery Circle near Vinton in Roanoke County. Officers arrived and, with the help of County Fire and Rescue Department personnel, began a search for the man who, in brutally cold weather and a high wind, was clad only in a short-sleeve tee shirt and jeans.

Because of the dangerous weather conditions and lack of protective clothing worn by the missing man, police and fire personnel realized that the man would quickly freeze to death if not found fast. With that in mind, an effort was made to rapidly get additional assistance in the search. Vinton police, state troopers, and off-duty county officers were called in and K-9 teams were requested. Even paper carriers for the Roanoke Times were asked to keep an eye out for the man.

Because of the life and death urgency of the situation, county police made a decision to employ the RoCo alert system to alert residents nearby of the situation and ask for their help in looking out for the man. At 3:42am, the following message was broadcast by the County Emergency Communications Center:

"COUNTY POLICE NEEDS HELP LOOKING FOR MISSING ELDERLY MALE NOW - ROANOKE COUNTY POLICE ARE LOOKING FOR A MISSING BLACK MALE, (name deleted), 70 YEARS OF AGE, 5 FOOT 9 INCHES, 170 POUNDS, BLACK AIR, BROWN EYES, MAY BE WEARING GLASSES. HE MAY BE WEARING BLUE JEANS AND A CUTOFF BLUE T-SHIRT. LEFT HIS HOME ON MONTGOMERY CIRCLE ABOUT 2 HOURS AGO. IF LOCATED, PLEASE CONTACT ROANOKE COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT IMMEDIATELY AT 562-3265. THANK YOU."

The RoCo Alert was transmitted to phones within a mile of the missing man's home (692 contacts) and many people, no doubt, received a surprising wake-up call from the Police Department.

The Police Department wishes to express its gratitude to the folks who heeded the alert and made the effort to get up and look outside for the man.

One of the searchers, Officer Spencer Lewis, found the man in some brush about a quarter mile from his home at 4:46am. He was only wearing the tee shirt, jeans, and had lost his shoes. The man was transported to a local hospital by Fire and Rescue personnel.

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